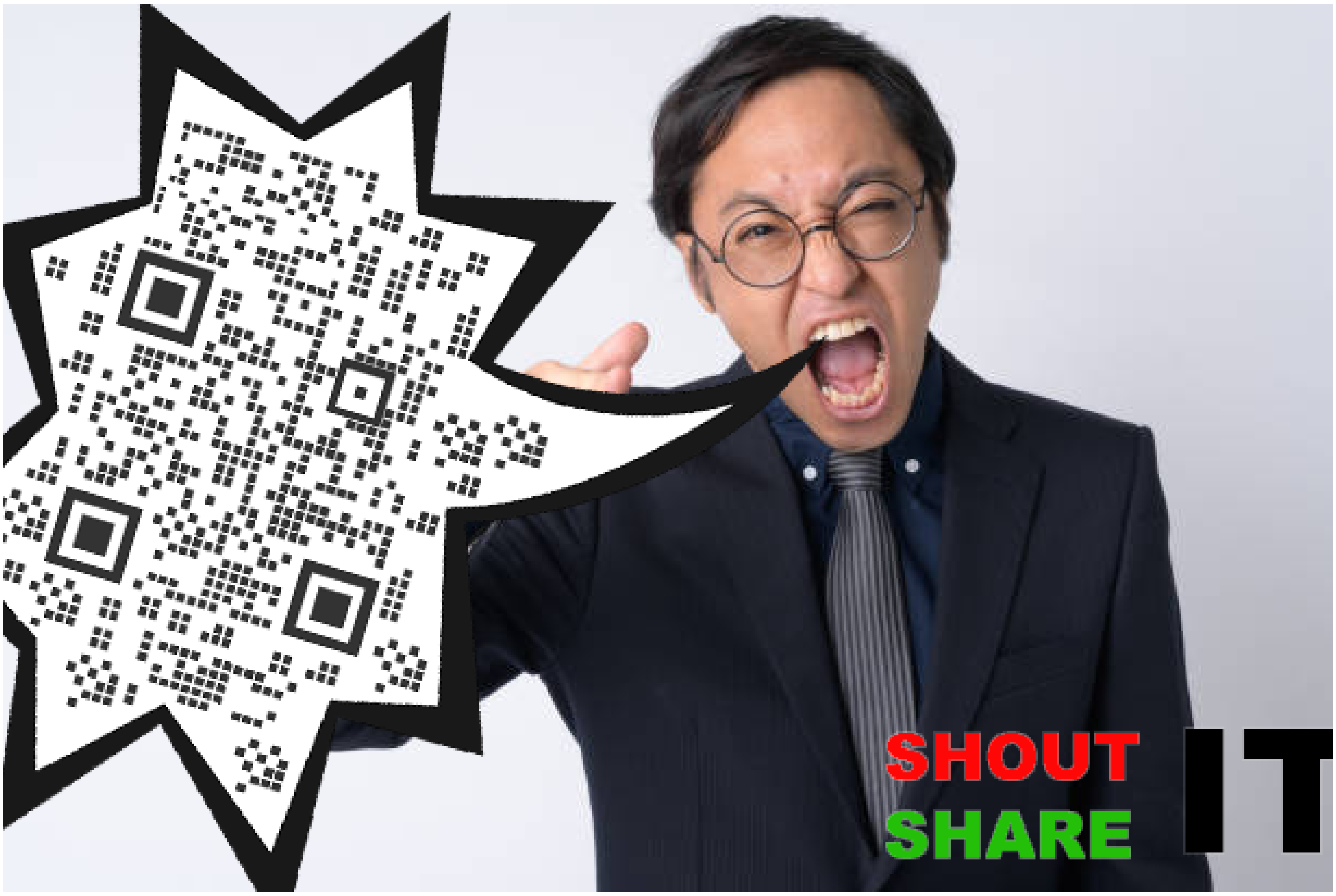
RAMAYANA
The Poisonous Tree

[Stories, Essays and Foot-Notes]

Ranganayakamma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RAMAYANA
THE POISONOUS TREE
[Stories, Essays and Foot-Notes]

Telugu Original

RANGANAYAKAMMA

English Translation

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A Note on Translation

This translation is based on the Telugu original ***'Ramayana Vishavruksham'*** (*Ramayana, the Poisonous Tree*), which appeared in three volumes in three consecutive years: 1974, 1975 and 1976. Since then all the three volumes have undergone several reprints: the first volume seven times, the second one for six times and the third four times. Recently, the writer has revised all the three volumes with a view to publishing them in a single volume. She has made some additions, deletions and alterations to the earlier editions. This translation, therefore, is based on the forthcoming/latest Telugu edition.

A note on this translation is necessary since the source language (Telugu) and the receptor language (English) are 'genetically' as well as 'culturally' unrelated and 'structurally' different.

The differences in syntax (grammar) and semantics (vocabulary including culture-specific words) of these two languages pose certain problems to the translators.

The grammatical features that pose problems are: articles, prepositions, auxiliaries, tense and aspect, voice, tag questions, conjunctions, word order, sentence length and sentence types.

One specific feature of the original is that it does not contain even a single passive-voice sentence whereas the translation, at some places, is not free from the passive voice.

The problems usually faced in the sphere of vocabulary are: Collocations, figurative expressions such as irony, idioms, metaphors and proverbs, forms of address, abuses, onomatopoeic words, reduplication words, religious and mythological terms, use of adjectives and adverbs, units of measurements and weights, the numbers and numerals, proper names, flora and fauna, birds and animals, and such other culture specific words.

Figurative expressions posed major problem. Wherever we have equivalents, direct or indirect, in English, we used them. Whenever we could not find equivalents, we have resorted to literal translations of some peculiar, language-specific expressions, with a view that the conceptual world of speakers of different languages overlap at least in certain areas and hence the literally translated source language expressions will be comprehensible to a reasonable extent. Yet, in some 'difficult' situations, we substituted the figurative expressions of the Source language by non-figurative expressions of the Receptor language. In the case of plant and animal worlds, which frequently appear in the original text, we have introduced the source language names since Botanical and Zoological terminology may not be intelligible to non-specialist readers. In such cases and in the specific cultural contexts we have reproduced the source language words in italics.

One extremely serious problem that we have faced was translating various elements of Humour: irony, ridicule, sarcasm, and wit, which the original text contains in abundance. The loss of these features of the original in the translation is obvious to those who read both the Telugu and English versions. Also there has been a considerable 'loss' when we could not translate the dialect of the illiterate characters.

The English translation of Sanskrit slokas is based on the Telugu translation as found in the Telugu original. Therefore, readers who have access to English translations of Valmiki's '*Ramayana*' may find differences in translation, *sarga* (chapter) numbers and even *sloka* (poem) numbers. The Telugu original is based on the Telugu translation of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, which two important traditional scholars published in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They are: Mr. Chadaluvada Sundara Rama Sastrulu and Mr. Gattupalli Sesha Charyulu.

Four persons (including me) have translated this work. The names of the translators appear in the inner title page in accordance with the quantity (not necessarily quality) of the work, which they have done. Apart from the inner title page, their names appear also at the end of the stories or links, which they have translated.

Once the translation of an item (a story or link) was over, I compared the translation with the Telugu original sentence by sentence and made modifications wherever I felt necessary, after discussing with the writer. **Our main concern and priority have been not merely reproducing the essential meaning of the original text but also the individual style of the original writer.** (*By style, we mean the specific manner in which the writer presents her ideas, intentions, attitudes and so on.*) In this process, there might have occurred some changes, which may not retain or present the scholarship and the translation ability of the respective translators fully. However, before beginning the translation, they had kindly agreed to tolerate my interference. I justify my interference with the help of the concept of 'World Englishes', which imply that one can allow the influence of the First or the Source language substratum including the nature of the style of the writer while translating.

After my comparison and the necessary modifications, I presented each draft of the translation of each item to Ms. **Meera Marathe**, an English language teacher in Hyderabad.

Ms.**Meera** read the translation of the major portions of the text (parts 1 & 2) with great care and patience and made useful corrections and suggestions to improve the quality of the translation. I have carried out those corrections and suggestions after discussing with the writer. I carried out almost all the grammatical corrections. However, it was not possible to carry out some corrections concerning the style where the writer or I felt such corrections might not convey the style of the original.

Mr. **R. Venkateswara Rao**, one of the translators, went through my translation of parts 3 & 4 and made corrections and suggestions.

Despite useful suggestions of the English language experts, the present translation may still have shortcomings due to either my oversight or my personal choice with regard to the suggestions made. Hence, I am responsible, not the language experts or the other translators, for the shortcomings that remain.

B.R. Bapuji

"Just as to the bourgeois, the disappearance of class property is the disappearance of production itself, so the disappearance of class culture is to him identical with the disappearance of all culture. That culture, the loss of which he laments, is, for the enormous majority, a mere training to act as a machine."

"The ruling ideas of each age have been the ideas of the ruling class."

Marx & Engels
('Manifesto of the Communist Party')

The Vedantists say,
"Know Yourself!"
Marxists also say so,
"Know Yourself!
Know What Your Class is!!"

-A Marxist

PART 1

Preface

After looking at this book or after reading a couple of words, virtuous people may feel like striking a match and burning it. If they burn it, it is the pages which will burn not thoughts. Thoughts are born and grow naturally out of experiences in the course of history. It is no use ignoring this fact.

If the title '*Ramayana, the poisonous tree*' makes even rationalists hesitant, it is the fault of the *Ramayana* not mine. If we understand clearly the seed out of which this poisonous tree grew and to which poisonous snakes it has been giving shelter so far, it becomes clear how suitable this title is.

This book is not meant for dogmatic pundits; devotees obsessed with temples; devotees who wear suits and those who are gems among the stupid women that arrogantly think that changing dresses, wearing make-up and hairstyle is 'progress'. This is meant for those children — into whose minds selfishness and dogma have not yet entered and who keep their minds open to self-evident facts and thoughts without any foulness and with awareness; for those young women and men who are not acquainted with any other thoughts or knowledge except weekly magazines and ordinary novels. It is my hope that this will serve the interests of the majority of the people who have been subjected for generations to political and economic exploitation and leading degraded, pathetic and oppressive lives without any hope for emancipation.

"Some people consider rejecting all that is old a progress"—This is one kind of criticism we hear against the new ways of thinking. But this is not an 'old' thing. It has not become 'old'. Values and culture, which the *Ramayana* propagates, are still reflected in daily life even today. To decide that it has not become old, it is enough to cite any incident that suggests the 'recitation of Rama's name' as a solution for the present-day problems.

Moreover, this attempt does not mean rejecting all that is old. All that is old is also human history. The objective of this attempt is to expose the origin and development of the *Ramayana* in the course of the evolution of history; its nature and content; and the real face of the social set-up, which it propagates daily.

"Many poets have written the *Ramayana* in different ways. Different stories have been composed based on *Valmiki's Ramayana* alone. Which do we consider as the basis?" — this is a question. Whichever we consider as the basis, all versions have the same aim. We will see this point in detail as we proceed further in the preface.

"Did *Ramayana* really happen or not? If it did, all the persons in it passed away in the remote past, didn't they? Then what is the use in debating about those people now? If it 'did not happen', what is the use in thinking so much about a fictitious story?" —These are also very important questions. But whether *Ramayana* did take place or not, what we are concerned with is its 'contents'. It's all the same whether Rama was a person who lived in the past for some time or he is a character, which a poet created.

What becomes evident to us from this story is the following:

- Society was already split into rich and poor classes.
- Kings like Dasaratha, Rama and Ravana ruled their kingdoms despotically in the interests of the rich class as the representatives of that class. In fact, they themselves possessed lands and wealth.
- Women led a life without independence, individuality and in the darkness of male domination.
- Ordinary people sank a thousand times deep into poverty, caste differences, beggary, prostitution, religious dogma and the wars between one race and another and between one class and another.
- The exploitative literature and culture of the ruling class infected the bones as well as souls of the population like bacteria.

Thus, we find in the *Ramayana* the economic, political and social conditions, principles and morals of that time. Some of them are still in currency even today in the same old form as well as with some modifications. This is important for us. Occurrence or non-occurrence of the *Ramayana* will not affect these facts.

The Story of Rama

Let us see about the *Ramayana* in brief.

Millions of people have shown a lot of devotion and respect for the story of Rama. As soon as they hear the word 'Rama', they go into ecstasies and fold their hands in reverence. The reason for this is a lot of respect and belief of the people in this character. Is Rama eligible for such belief and reverence? Such a question may appear extremely sinful.

The story which people commonly know about the *Ramayana* is that — Rama's father did not give Rama the legitimate right to rule the kingdom but sent him to the forest. While Rama faced many hardships along with his wife in the forest, a wicked person abducted Sita, denying peace to Rama even in his life in the forest. Rama sinks in the sea of sorrow, wages a battle with his valour, kills that wicked person and gets back his wife; Rama returns to the kingdom, rules over people happily but once again the wife and husband had to separate from one another! Thus, from the beginning to the end of the story, people feel sorrow! Sorrow! Sorrow! Sorrow! Each person sheds tears that flow from his melted heart!

If the story had really happened like this, it is certainly heart breaking for every one. But, is this the story of the

Ramayana? Is truth this much? Even if we see it according to Valmiki's story, does Rama really have a right over his father's kingdom? Was he sent to forest unjustly? Did Rama really spend the life of a sage away from politics in the forest? Did he really have respect for his father? Was he really a valorous person? Did he wage war against Ravana, only for the sake of his wife? Did he, subsequently, rule people so that they lived in abundance. Among the millions who worship Rama, how many people know these kinds of facts and myths? Did any divine-story teller or a scholar tell these things without concealing facts? Do they, in fact, know all these things?

In fact, the literate among the common people are few. Even among the literates, those who read epics and mythologies are still fewer. Anyway, all people hear Divine-stories (*Harikathas*), Folk-stories (*Jamukulakathas)*, folk songs or mythology pundits. Except these mythology pundits, none might have read the actual story. Jamukula story tellers, folk singers and those who tell *Harikathas* merely learn only those songs and stories that have been transmitted from one generation to the other and narrate the same to people and eke out a living. Even these persons do not know the actual story.

The only people who know the story are pundits. But they don't tell things as they are. This does not mean that Valmiki wrote very sincerely and pundits alone are not telling truth to people.

The story of *Ramayana* must have been in vogue among people even before Valmiki. That poet turned such story into his poetry and slokas. While telling the story he presented it with many myths. However mythically he told the story, it was imperative on his part to speak some truths at least on some occasions. But these pundits do not allow people to know even those truths, which the poet mentioned. All these things will become clear while we read the stories in this book.

No story reaches people truthfully and clearly without any myth or mask. For example, Rama, although the eldest son, did not have the right over the kingdom of his father. The kingdom belonged to Bharata! Because, while marrying Kaikeyi, Dasaratha promised that he would give the kingdom to her son. This is what Valmiki, himself wrote. This is so important a fact that the entire *Ramayana* is based on it. The poet pushed such an important fact as a trivial point to a corner and mentioned it after a long while. He mentioned it while Rama was in the forests! The fact came out only then! Moreover, through the mouth of Rama himself! This means Rama too knew this fact right from the beginning! It would not have been Rama's fault if he was prepared for coronation as he was not aware of Bharata's right.

Is it not hypocrisy on the part of Rama to be ready for coronation even after knowing the fact? Why did the poet write as if Rama too knew about Bharata's right? The poet could have lead the story as if 'Rama agreed for coronation' because he was unaware of the fact. Why didn't the poet do so? — We get many such doubts as these. For some doubts, we don’t even get answers.

The poet had so crazy a devotion for the character of Rama that whatever that character did was right for him. If Rama got ready for coronation with the full knowledge that it was Bharata’s right to be crowned a king, he thinks it is right because it was Rama who got ready for such an act! The poet is blinded by his devotion that he wonders, “Can we find fault in Lord Rama?’ What care does such a poet take in portraying that character? In fact it is not that the poet portrays the character of Lord Rama, it is the character of Rama that leads the poet. The poet unfolds the story by worshipping that character. It is the duty of the poet to flatter that character. If that is the case, where is the need for the poet to take care while depicting that character?

When the truth of ‘Bharata’s right over the kingdom’ is present in the story itself, concealing it and driving the story along another path; attempting to make people believe that some injustice had been done to Rama and people believing it to be true — how ridiculous these things are! How deceptive these things are!

What remains in the story if Rama does not have the right over the kingdom? What injustice has been done to Rama? Is there any meaning in the lamentation of people that Rama could not get the kingdom? If Bharata’s right was true, Rama’s right would become false. The story of *Ramayana* itself, its very greatness would become false.

The poet mentioned about Bharata’s right not because he thought, “Let me speak the truth without concealing it’. He mentioned it because it was unavoidable to mention it according to that story.

Suppose a person talks about some issues. While talking, he tries to conceal certain things which he does not want to tell us. But either due to his negligence or stupidity, certain things, which he wanted to conceal, will come out in his own words. He won’t recognize this fact. Thus those truths which he does not tell us willingly will also come out. Those truths will be contradictory to what he outwardly says. We came to know these truths only through him and not that we gathered them from elsewhere or concocted them. This is what the poet has done in many contexts in the *Ramayana*. Concealing of truth and glorification of untruth by raising it to the skies! At every step we find the poet over anxious to conceal things.

The stories in this volume will appear unbelievable because we do not know the actual facts very clearly.

Some incidents and dialogues of these stories are absent in the original. But they are not contrary to the original. This means, even if I depict a new incident, it has its basis in the original. Characters and their nature too are in accordance with the original story. The basis for dialogues and criticism is Valmiki’s original story. Here a question arises, ‘What, then, is new that this book says?’ The aim of this book is to make explicit many important issues that are concealed and try to explain their social meaning.

There are mainly four aspects in these stories: (1) Those, which are not told, even though the poet ought to have told them. (2) Those which the poet did not at all like to tell. (3) Those which he told but with outrageous distortions. (4) Those which he told very explicitly. Here, let us see a couple of examples for each point.

1. Those things which are not told even though the poet ought to have told

The poet, who depicted even cattle for several pages, did not mention 'Urmila'. Is it not necessary to utter a single word about this character? If Sita is a devoted wife because she accompanied her husband in the forest, Urmila is not a devoted wife because she did not go to the forest along with her husband. Hence based on this fact, if I write that Urmila was uninterested in her husband and she is not as devoted a wife as Sita, will it be my creation? Is it possible to tell this incident, which I have written about, as contrary to the original since it is not found in the original?

Another point which the poet did not mention is this: Dasaratha gives Sita sarees that are enough for 14 years, ornaments, perfumes; armaments, shields and weapons for his sons; a basket, crow-bar to dig and other implements. All these things were carried up to Guha's kingdom in a chariot. There, Guha's servants took them in a boat and crossed the river Ganga. The poet talked about those articles upto that place. Thereafter he has not mentioned them. How did those things move from there? Did they fly? Did servants carry them? How did all this reach the forest? The poet did not talk about this. Even if he did not talk about it, will it amount to betraying the original if I say who carried the entire luggage?

2. Those things which the poet didn't like to mention

Rama, Lakshmana and Sita occasionally walk along forests and villages. They come across only 'sages' and none else, why? Aren't there ordinary people in villages? Why not? They must have been there. But the poet does not like to mention them. He always would like to tell about sages alone! The beauty of the epic poem would not be affected if he had written that either tribals or wood-cutters were seen in the forest. Yet the poet did not mention them. I have mentioned them. Will it be contrary to the original story if I wrote that Rama, Lakshamana and Sita came across some peasants, wood-cutters, a washerman, a beggar, folk singers and other travellers? Is it possible to argue, "No, it can't happen. It is impossible to come across people like that?"

The poet simply narrates the utterances of the characters but never mentions their inner thoughts—except that the young Rama argues with his own inner-self for a while before killing Tataki. The poet, here and there, used expressions like "mind, speech and deed", implying that 'his mind, speech and deed are identical and consistent'. This means that it also happens that those things will sometimes be inconsistent, won't they? When a character expresses an opinion, it may or may not have the same opinion in its inner-self. There will be voices in the inner self of a person that question, argue, and oppose views and deeds, which that person doesn't like. Hence such voices will be characters in '*The Poisonous Tree*' with the names such as "Rama's soul", "Lakshmana's commonsense", and "Sita within Sita". These voices occasionally express the inner feelings of the characters. It is not tantamount to falsifying the original story.

3. Those things which the poet said but with outrageous distortions

Rakshasas are enemies of Rama. They are the creation of the poet's own imagination with out any basis in biology. Readers need not accept this myth verbatim since the entire story is based on it. In the stories of '*The Poisonous Tree*', all are human beings. This is contrary to the original. Yet it is not contrary to common sense.

Rama's character is the most important of all those things, which the poet distorted outrageously. We will see about this in great detail throughout this book.

4. Things which the poet explicitly said

Certain things reveal themselves at some place in the story. For example, in the night when Rama, Sita and Lakshmana enter the forest after crossing the river Ganga, Rama disgorges all his sorrow before Lakshmana. In the course of his lamentation, he says, "Laksmana! Even the birds in my mother's harem would abuse Kaikeyi, saying, 'Kill Kaikeyi…bite her leg' and make my mother happy. But I could not make my mother happy in the least as the birds do. (Don't rush to the illusion that Rama has love for his mother. The reason will be clear later.)

While reading Valmiki, readers won't know that "birds in Kausalya's harem abuse Kaikeyi" until they read the scene when Rama cries in the forest. To make this fact contextually relevant, we can depict the anti-Kaikeyi atmosphere by mentioning birds in the cages when we first mention Kausalya's harem. Because it is the poet himself who mentioned clearly that birds raised by Kausalya abuse Kaikeyi.

Similarly, the poet clearly mentioned the slavish mentality of Lakshmana. When Rama, after reaching Panchavati, said to Lakshmana, "Lakshmana! Select a place where we can build a house", Lakshmana shakes with obedience and respect, bows down, salutes and says, "I am not an independent person. If I decide where to build, it will amount to doing things independently. So I will build a house if you decide and order me". Only ten years after the forest life does the poet say that Lakshmana does not act independently in any matter and he is servile to his elder brother! Based on this incident, I depicted Lakshmana's behaviour as servile right from the beginning.

Thus the changes that I made in these stories relate to the four points mentioned so far.

Now let us see Rama's character a little.

Sri Rama

We need not pay any attention to Rama if he were a prince in some *Kasimajili* travellers' stories. Rama is not a character in such travellers' stories. He is the actual incarnation of god! It is very important to know things like 'According to this story, what sort of person is the Rama whom millions of people worship daily? How did he live? How did he behave? What sort of things did he preach to the world?'

Rama does not possess any semblance of any good qualities with which the poet has depicted him throughout the story. The poet flooded Rama with all kinds of depictions: that he is a warrior; a man with wisdom; a person who responds uniformly to both happiness and hardship; Vedantist; a person who knows every thing; a sage and so on and so forth. But if we see according to the poet's narration of the story, Rama keeps doing things, which are contrary to this depiction. He proves that all the praises of the poet are utter lies. The real features of Rama are: (1) False practices that deceive the world. (2) Moralising others. (3) Hypocritical serenity. (4) Two faced. (5) Arrogance that he alone is a knowledgeable person. (6) Arrogance of suspecting and ridiculing the intimate persons who serve him. (7) Cruel nature of torturing helpless people...we find many such bad and wicked qualities in Rama with proofs.

Even according to the poets' narration, Rama's respect for his father is a lie. Observance of truth is a lie. Valour is a lie. Sagehood is a lie. Divinity is a lie. Knowledge is a lie. All the good qualities he is portrayed with are unreal.

Why did the poet do this? Why did the poet, who described obedience to father's order as Rama's commitment, write that Rama abused his father while he lived in the forest?

Why did the poet—who described Rama as a great warrior—write that Rama cried as soon as a Rakshasa kidnapped Sita? Why should Rama cry and not act? Why should Lakshmana criticise Rama in that context? — We will come across very natural doubts as we proceed in the story. The poet gives some wishy-washy explanations to these doubts just as he gave them in the case of Bharata's right over the kingdom.

The so-called 'obedience to the father's order' is, in fact, a false tradition. No son feels really happy from the bottom of his heart if he has to face many hardships in order to practise such a value. But, a son will pretend that he is following that value happily because it is considered to be a worthwhile value. Self-deception and deception of others! Desire for fame! Illusion that he is following a great ideal path!

Just as a person cannot walk straight if he carries a mountain on his back for the sake of fame, it is not possible for any person to behave with purity of heart and without fear if he is obliged to follow these false morals and confusing duties. It is wrong if society puts excess weight on the head of a person but it is not wrong if the person cannot walk straight. Owing to that unnecessary weight, stooping is very natural. The poet, unconsciously, has depicted this natural behaviour at every place.

The reason for the mutual contradictory nature of several morals, which the poet has written, is that there is no place for rationalism or logic in society, which dictates those morals. The poet cannot demonstrate in his writing logic, which the society does not have. In a society, which deceives itself with myths and hypocrisy, the poet too is a hypocrite. The characters that he creates too are hypocritical. Hence, Rama is an obedient son although he abused his father in a vulgar manner. He is a great warrior although he demonstrated cowardice at every step. He is full of good qualities although full of bad qualities. This is deception of self and others, which the society practises.

Rama had some amount of natural consciousness and certain questions in his boyhood. But, the preaching of the sages and arguments of pundits killed his natural consciousness. He lost his freedom the day when he bowed his head to the values of the elders without being satisfied by their arguments. He became an old person in his youth. After his boyhood, he had no youth but old age. Except imitating his father and grand fathers, he did not have natural doubts and conflict and reached the stage of a living dead person. His restlessness and dissatisfaction had to come out in many vulgar actions.

Here, what we need to understand clearly is that the values and the morals, which Rama practised, gave him such a vulgar character. Every character in the *Ramayana* stands as reflections of the then existing values in the form of kings, sages, blind followers of fathers and husbands in accordance with the ideals and values of the then existing society.

Baseless Myths and Rationalism

The entire Valmiki's *Ramayana* is crowded with exaggerations and baseless myths. Stopping the sun and the moon, lifting mountains, drinking rivers, drying oceans, reappearance and talking of dead persons — many such myths. All these myths are contradictory to the laws of nature. Yet what we have to understand from such stories is that human desire to conquer Nature manifested in the form of such stories. We will see in detail these myths elsewhere in this volume. Therefore, we will stop discussing them here.

While Rama was leaving for the forest, birds and animals fainted; the sun and the moon receded in their aura — thus the poet uses pathetic fallacy to depict his sorrow. We have to laugh at all this and ignore it. Ignoring it is not tantamount to accepting all these exaggerations.

Usually, Rationalists fight against the outward forms of the myths, which the poets depict. They ignore the important thing, which they must be concerned with. For example Gautama, Ahalya's husband, having come to know that Ahalya had had a sexual relationship with Indra, curses her to turn into smoke without being identified by others, and leaves for another place. In this instance, our logical thinking immediately focuses on questions such as: Does cursing exist? Is it possible to turn a person into smoke? Can it happen this way? This logic is connected with the phenomenon of Nature. There is, however, another point here. The fact is that the husband punished and left his wife who had had a sexual relationship with another man. This is a social phenomenon. Why did Ahalya have sexual relationship with a person other than her husband when she knew that it was contrary to the value of chastity of women? What would have happened if Gautama, Ahalya's husband had not come to know about this? Though Gautama cursed Indra (We will see this story in link-1 in detail), all the sages made some concessions and relieved Indra from the harmful effects of the curse. Why did they not do the same thing for Ahalya? Ahalya's husband left her because she had committed that crime, but why did Indra's wife not leave her husband in response to the crime he had committed? Why don't we find in these stories incidents where wives rejected and left their husbands who had had sexual relationships with other women? Raising questions of this kind in a logical manner is 'Rationalism connected with social issues'.

What we should understand from this story is this: There was a time when 'sexual relationships of women with men other than their husbands' were not considered wrong. Such relationships began to be considered wrong after some time. It became an offence that received punishment. Men did not receive any punishment for a similar offence. Yet women followed the old customs occasionally and as a result of it suffered the punishments. 'Chastity' was not yet deeply entrenched into the psychology of women. Under such circumstances, Ahalya had had a sexual relationship willingly with Indra, although she was afraid of the possible punishment from her husband. If Gautama had not returned and seen Indra, Ahalya's act would have remained a secret. No doubt that wives of many sages as well as ordinary women had such secret sexual relationships. What is special in a man not to receive punishment in such a sexual relationship while a woman received it? How did man acquire such a superior position? Why did society accept his superiority? We are yet to answer these questions. Knowing the real answers to these questions means knowing the root causes of social values. Using examples of such stories that enable us to know so much 'history' and questioning — "what is cursing? Does it happen this way?' — amounts to questioning the outward form. Such a criticism alone does not constitute Rationalism. This is also necessary. But it is important to grasp social issues.

Another point of the same kind: There had been no rains for ten years. The entire universe is burning to ashes. Anasuya, with her power of chastity, created fruits on the trees and water in the river Ganga for the sake of the sages. This is the story. Our common sense showers questions on this point as well: "Is it possible for any person to create fruits and water? Why should that person create fruits on the trees? Why people take trouble of climbing the trees? Why didn't she create fruits in the hands? Should people go to the Ganga to fetch water? Why didn't she create water in the pots at home?" — If we go on like this, we can logically argue to any extent. But if our questions stop here, there won't be anything that we learn from this story. There are some social issues involved in this story. They are: women had fully accepted the value of chastity or devotion to their husbands. It had become 'respectable' in society. For whom did this virtuous woman create fruits and water? For the sake of sages! Why should she create them only for the sages? While the entire universe is burning, don't all the people face hardships? She should save all people, shouldn't she? Why didn't the poet say that 'she created fruits and water for the sake of all human being?' It is because the story tellers didn't need 'the welfare of all people'. The 'protection of the sages' was their sole duty. Whoever had whatever abilities and wherever there were riches, everything was useful only for sages. Why? What about other people?

How do kings rule?

Let us see some examples from Valmiki's '*Ramayana*' as to why and how a king rules a kingdom.

(1) In Dasaratha's words: Having come to know the news of Rama's proposed coronation, Kaikeyi doesn't speak to Dasaratha and looks indifferent. Pretending as if he is not aware of the reason, Dasaratha tries to appease her saying, "Kaikeyi, what troubles you? Tell me what you want. Tell me, do you want some one to be killed? For the sake of your happiness, I will kill him, however innocent he may be. Tell me, do you want to save any person? I will revoke the punishment of that person, however guilty he may be. Do you want me to turn any rich person into a pauper? Tell me quickly. I will send my army, plunder all his money and grain and make him a pauper overnight. Or do you want to turn some pauper into a rich person? I will give him riches and wealth and make him rich"—This is how King Dasaratha's prattling goes on. The poet describes this Dasaratha as a great 'ideal king'. People too believe it and the light of king's reputation spreads in all directions. But this is the actual fact!

This means that any king can do whatever he wants, disregarding the question of what is just and what is unjust! Anybody can get anything done if he has the patronage of a king or a queen. Those who are subjected to their fury will totally perish without any trace. Thus, it is a lie that people receive justice from the rule of a despot. This is true of any ruler: whether Dasaratha rules, Rama rules or Pullayya rules.

(2) Rama on kings and their rule: When Rama was to leave for the forest, he did not agree to take Sita with him. He warned her to stay in the harem only. "Bharata is going to become the king. You should be very obedient to him, you know!

Never praise me before him. Except themselves, Kings cannot tolerate others being praised. They let people live comfortably only if those people are loyal and serve them. Otherwise they develop a hatred against those people even if they are their own children and see that they are destroyed. Spend your time serving Bharata and his wives until I return!" says Rama. From these words of Rama it is clear how just the kings will be, isn't it?

After reaching the bank of the Ganga in a chariot and while Sumanthra was about to leave for Ayodhya, Rama says, "Keep serving Bharata and my father. Kings do not tolerate defeat and agony. They dream to rule in order to fulfil their wishes without any obstacle. Tell my mother to serve Bharata. She should not be careless because he is young. Age has nothing to do with honouring the king. Due to his riches and wealth, a king becomes superior to all and is honoured".

At Chitrakuta, Rama tells Lakshmana, "Do you know why I actually wanted to rule? So that all my brothers live for ever with riches, wealth, royal luxuries and all kinds of comforts"

Thus Rama wanted to rule in order to fulfil his wishes, to make his friends and relatives comfortable and to destroy those who were not obedient to him! Is this the 'rule of Rama' which people dream of?

(3) Kausalya, while admonishing Dasaratha after Rama left Ayodhya: "How much injustice you have done to Rama! Will Bharata give up the kingdom and treasury when Rama returns after fourteen years? Even if he gives it up, will my son accept it? Will the Brahmins with a good character accept food if you offer them food after you have served the Brahmins with a bad character. Will a tiger eat flesh, which another animal has eaten and abandoned? Will Rama drink liquor whose essence is consumed by others? Will Rama accept the kingdom, which Bharata has enjoyed first? (He accepted it with great joy. It is a different thing) — This is how the queen's admonition proceeds!

A Kingdom is like a 'mango'. First a King sucks it and then another king sucks it. If Rama rules the kingdom after Bharata has ruled it (that is, if Rama sucks it after Bharata has sucked), then it will have been defiled. Well, did any other king not suck and defile that kingdom before Bharata? The tree has just borne the first fruit of Kosala kingdom! Fame and manliness of Rama are upheld only if Rama sucks the fruit before Bharata! This is the logic of the poet! 'Eating' kingdom! This appears to be an appropriate comparison when we think deeply about it. The great deed, which a king performs, is not to rule people so that they live happily but to swallow up the kingdom himself. It is like extracting comforts, benefits of the kingdom just as they suck the juice of a fruit. Hence, the poet's argument was that Rama should suck the 'kingdom' before Bharata.

(4) Note how traditional codes (Dharma Sastras) and law protect the kings: While hunting, one day, Dasaratha threw an arrow carelessly and it hit Karana, the son of a sage. The poet wonderfully depicts the scene in which the sage's son gives Dasaratha courage. While experiencing the suffering of death, the sage's son consoles Dasaratha, "Oh King! Perhaps you are worried that the sin of killing a Brahmin will affect you. I am not a Brahmin, you know! I was born to a Sudra woman and a Vysya man. The sin of killing a Brahmin will not affect you. Take heart! Don't worry!" Thus consoling Dasaratha, the sage's son breathed his last.

Except when you kill holy Brahmins, it is not a sin if you kill useless Sudras? Is it a sin when you kill dogs, foxes and insects? This is what our dear poet uttered through the mouth of a Sudra. This boy has not become a Vysya like his father. He became a Sudra like his mother.

The parents of the boy were blind. They were living in the forest *without doing any harm even to an ant,* were sitting in a corner praying to god and were wholly dependent on their son and *treated him as their eyes*. There was no way for them even to get a handful of water in the absence of the son. Dasaratha stood in front of them and noticed their agony. The parents of the boy foresaw the future hardships and thought that death was better than the future hardships and committed suicide by jumping into the funeral pyre of their son while Dasaratha simply stood watching them. Yet, the sin had not affected him. Because the parents were not Brahmins.

Dasaratha could have consoled those old parents and stopped their suicide. He could have arranged for a servant to provide them with fruits and water at appropriate timings. But Dasaratha did not feel responsible for them. Whatever Dasaratha did was just since they were not Brahmins. — The poet of *Ramayana* declares that great kings treated the people like their children with such justice as this!

Certain things that make us laugh

(1) In response to the boons, which Kaikeyi asked for, Dasaratha was annoyed thus, "Even if the husband tells the wife to ask for boons, she should ask for such boons, which make her husband happy; can she demand such boons, which cause the husband inconvenience?" Had his wives asked for saris or jewels, King Dasaratha would have immediately ordered for it and thus *sent the rays of his fame in all directions*! Having missed such fame, His Excellency became furious at his wife, "You wicked woman! If I send Rama to live in the forest because of your boons, I will die due to that agony. If I die Rama too will die for my sake. Sita dies, Lakshmana dies, Bharata dies, Satrughna dies and all queens die. All the animals will die. Because of your demands, there will be such a great loss!" This is how Dasaratha read a long list of people who would have died following his death.

Lakshmana also says to Guha, "We are leaving for the forests. Well, how can our father live without us? If you go to Ayodhya and look there, you will find all people dead due to the agony caused by the King's death. *Cats and bats must be moving in all the houses*".

But, the funny thing was that nobody died after Dasaratha died. Moreover, there was a mood of curiosity and people were gossiping, "The old king has died; the eldest son is in the forest; Bharata has not yet returned from his uncle's place. What will happen now?"

When he began to describe that ' if Dasaratha dies, all people in the kingdom would die', does the poet not have a doubt that, if Dasaratha really dies later, nobody will cry for him and then all this description will be ludicrous.

(2) The real basis for the entire *Ramayana* is that Dasaratha gave boons to Kaikeyi without denying the fact that he had promised boons to Kaikeyi. No character in the whole book has confidence in Dasaratha's commitment to truth. Neither persons like Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, Satrughna, Kausalya, ministers like Sumantra nor priests like Vasista accept Dasaratha's commitment to truth. Thus nobody believes in Dasaratha's commitment to truth.

In the dream of Bharata, the poet resorted to different feats like sinking Dasaratha in a big vessel filled with boiling hot oil, rolling him in a heap of dung, unlocking his long hair and parading him on a donkey. Even Dasaratha himself does not believe in his own commitment to truth. He does not say that he did so since he had promised. He always says, "Having surrendered to a woman out of sexual desire, I gave boons which Kaikeyi asked".

Finally, the secret of commitment to truth is meant for preaching to people how bad it is to surrender to a woman!

(3) Kausalya scolds Dasaratha, "If my son gets angry? He can fell skies and the heavens with arrows. He can make the earth static". How nice it would have been if Rama had got angry! We could have seen the skies and heavens if they had fallen down.

(4) Rama — whom sages glorify that he could fight with 11 thousand enemy warriors simultaneously and conquer them while protecting himself, his chariot driver, chariots and horses — as soon as he put his foot in the forest after crossing the river Ganga, looks at the surroundings and says to Lakshamana, "Lakshamana! It would have been a very difficult task for me to protect Sita if you had not come. Both of you walk in front and I will walk behind you. I will protect you from behind". Does one walk in front or at the back if he wants to protect others in the forest.

(5) Rama, here and there, cracked good jokes.

- "People feel happy watching the sunrise and sunset; how foolish they are! They don't have the sense and worry that they grow in age by *one part of the day*", says Rama!

This means people must learn to yell in alarm as soon as dawn breaks and cry aloud as soon as it becomes night!

- "Of the things that we do, some bear fruit and some don't. Does this not mean anything other than destiny?"
- "People will be comfortable only if

traders engage themselves in trade, won't they?"

Rama too talking about 'destiny' and 'trading'!

(6) When Rama prepares to leave for the forest life, Sita tells Rama that she too would like to go with him. Rama does not agree initially. Then Sita questions, "Brahmins who knew Astrology said that I would live in forests for some time. How will that prediction become true if you don't take me with you? You should make the Brahmins' words come true by taking me along with you, shouldn't you?"

Yes, Rama should help the words of the Brahmin foretellers! Those words will become real if he helps!

(7) Bharata was at his maternal grand father's home. He did not know about the boons given to his mother, Rama's departure for the forests and Dasaratha's death. Messengers went to Bharata in order to take him to Ayodhya without informing him of any of the different pieces of news. In the course of his enquiry, Bharata asks, "Is venerable Kausalya well? Is the most modest Sumitra well? Are my father and brothers well? How is my mother who is hypocritical, arrogant, furious tempered, proud and mediocre?" What should we call this description of the poet?

Is it cleverness or should we give a much greater name? We have to think about this!

(8) After the death of Dasaratha all the priests assemble and resolve unanimously as follows: "In a country where there is no king, clouds don't thunder. There won't be lightning, and it won't rain. As there will be none to punish, wives and sons won't submit to their husbands and fathers respectively".

This means, wives submit to husbands, and sons to fathers only due to the fear of punishment. Not out of love!

Talking about the necessity of a king: "Those who violate caste related codes and those who become atheists without fear of the other world of hell or heaven—such people will become good only because of punishments given by the king". It seems that our poet does not at all have any idea about atheists. The poet thinks that atheists will become devotees (believers of god) due to the fear for punishment.

"Tellers and listeners of mythologies will not benefit from mythologies if there were no king. The king protects people like his own children" (We have already seen how the king protects people!)

(9) Bharata, along with his men and might, leaves for forests in order to get Rama back into the kingdom. In his way he finds the hermitage of sage Bharadwaja who asks him, "Are you going to do any harm to Rama?"

"No, venerable sage! I am going to get back my brother", says Bharata.

"Yes, I realised this fact through divine sight. Yet I am asking you to confirm whether it is true or not".

This is, perhaps, testing whether his divine sight is functioning properly or not—as if checking up an engine!

(10) Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, during their forest life, visit the hermitage of sage Atri. Sage Atri's wife, Anasuya, is a devoted wife, who is faithful to her husband : an old woman with grey hair and trembling body. She gave Sita a garland of flowers and cosmetics and said, "The fruit of penance has remained with me. I am giving these gifts with my power that I gained by performing penance. If you wear this garland you will remain young forever. Your beauty will be enhanced with these cosmetics. If you wear them, you will make your husband happy with your youth".

What about her? Why couldn't she remain young forever by wearing them? Perhaps sage Atri is fond of the gray haired head that resembles *a basket of white flour*!

We can see many more such great humorous scenes as these throughout this book.

Similarities in life between those days and these days

Notice, the close resemblance between values of *Ramayana*, which was written a very long time ago and the daily lives of the present day.

(1) While narrating her personal life, Sita tells Anasuya, "My father sank in the sea of agony when I reached marriageable age. The father of a girl, even if he is Devendra, the king of gods, should feel inferior in others' view, shouldn't he? Is there any difference between the problem of marriage of girls of the present day and the problem of Sita's marriage? What a surprise this is! Bearing a daughter was a humiliation, both then and now! Why hasn't this social situation change during this long period of thousands of years?

(2) Guha belongs to the Boya caste, a hunters' caste. Rama passes through the kingdom of Guha while going to the forest. Lakshmana, without sleeping during that night, guards his brother who was asleep. Guha says to Laxmana, "Oh, My child, You are sons of a king. You should live in comfort. Go to sleep comfortably. My men and I will serve you. People like us should face hardships, not you". Guha, thus, exhibits his social inferiority. Upper caste people should not work. Lower caste people alone have to serve them.

Bharata, while telling Kausalya that he has nothing to do with the wicked act of his mother, laments and curses himself as follows: "If I were a party to this offence, I would have the sin of serving low castes". This social value — whereby low castes respect higher castes and higher castes ridicule low castes as degraded people — became a social value and these caste distinctions have remained intact since then.

(3) In '*Ramayana*', husbands do not consult their wives when they want to do something. Dasaratha did not say anything to Kausalya: Either about sending young Rama with Viswamitra, fixing his coronation to adult Rama or performing any great rites or sacrifices. Even today, husbands do not consider their wives as partners. When a husband shouts at his wife, "Shut up, go inside!" in films or novels, we are 'fascinated' by the male 'serenity'. The wife, with self-satisfied smiles, says, "...well sir! Why do you talk like this sir!" and goes out from one door and comes back from another door.

(4) Rama and Lakshmana, wherever they go, say, "We are sons of King Dasaratha", but never mention the names of their mothers. Even today, law and society are not concerned with a living being called 'mother'. When a son has to introduce himself, he mentions his father, "I am the son of Mr. Jagannatham" (That is, whoever be his mother but he is fortunate to have Mr. Jagannatham as his father). Looking at that young man who says that with pride, we are happy and say, "Oh, I see". We don't ask, "Who is your mother?" The fact that there is a living being called mother is not acknowledged by traditional codes, the governmental laws or even a health worker in the Malaria department.

(5) While returning to Ayodhya after the death of Dasaratha, Bharata enters the city. He looks around from the chariot and comments, "...Why are auspicious instruments of music not heard? Earlier the lustful persons used to play sexual games in the gardens and return to their homes quickly while the dawn broke. Why are they not seen now?—This is how Bharata laments, as he does not find debauchees. Wives and husbands do not have the need to spend time in gardens at night and go home quickly as dawn breaks, do they? Is there any difference between gardens in Ayodhya of that time and brothels of the present time? If we go on narrating like this, there will be no end to these similarities. Rich-poor differences, caste distinctions, male domination, female subordination, prostitution, bribery, beggary and many such features were present then and are now.

Even after so many thousands of years and after so much progress in science and civilization, the situation is the same both in the past and the present. The same values, the same morals and the same kind of problems. Why didn't a change take place in the situation?

Some people proudly declare that "time has changed. We have progressed a lot. We are in the 20th century..." This is not wholly true. In terms of the century, we are in the 20th century but we have not yet turned ourselves towards the science of that 20th century or its experiences. Instead of following the calculations of an almanac, if we see the calculation of the problems of life, we are not in the 20th century...but in the age of Rama! Rama lived in the age of his forefathers! Therefore, we are living in the age of the forefathers of Rama!

The Actual Aim of this 'Preface'

When people read a religious book, moral science, an epic poem or any book that reflects social conditions, some readers defend it very strongly while others oppose it very vehemently. Why does the same book create mutually contradictory opinions among people? Let us look at the *Ramayana*. Why do some people defend the values that it preaches? Why do others reject those same values? When both mother and father are responsible for the birth of a child, why did 'respect for father' alone become a special commitment? Why is devotion to mother not present as a commitment? Devotion to wife has not become the duty of man. Moreover he had a free hand in sexual relations.'Devotion to husband' became a great duty of women. Why? While some women were devoted wives, why did some women become prostitutes? Why have inequalities come into existence? We need correct answers to hundreds of such questions.

It is not an answer if someone mumbles, "Why ask all these questions? A long time ago…our elders introduced it. This is our culture."

New questions will crop up, "True, our elders introduced it. Why did they do so? Our culture is like this, true! But why is it so?"

When a question crops up, we need an answer.

What will happen if you order a straw that grows in the soil, "Stop! Don't grow! Sages and Vedas are asking you not to grow! Stop. It is bad to grow. Stop!" The same thing happens if you order questions not to crop up.

What we should learn from the elders and their experience is not the knowledge to kill questions but to understand them from the roots.

Any religious story like the '*Ramayana*' appears like a story concerning devotion to god. What does devotion mean whether it is devotion to god,devotion to the king, devotion to Brahmins or any other kind of devotion? Do people need this? Why do they need?

Do we find human history in these stories? Do we see the past in the '*Ramayana*'? What period does this story indicate? What does it tell people? - Whatever religious story we read and whatever religious story we read and whatever *Purana* (ancient story) we hear, we have to think about these aspects.

Human beings should be aware of their history - past, present and future! To the possible extent that we can gather it and understand it.

Whether it is the '*Ramayana*' or any other text, it must have emerged from some stage in history. If we do not know the period of that stage, how can we understand the contents of that story?

Therefore, we should know something about 'history'. However briefly we may examine history, it will be very long. This story had emerged from that history. How can we understand a book without knowing past and present?

The actual aim of the preface is to discuss this point. What we have said so far is merely a brief introduction to the *Ramayana*.

We can compare 'human history' with any phenomenon in Nature. For example, let us compare it with the flow of water. The flow of water depends on the rainfall and the topography (ups and downs of the earth). If there is no rain, the flow dries up. If the surface of the earth is high at a given place the water flows back. If the surface is low at a given place, water flows down speedily. If the surface is flat, the flow of water stops. These laws apply to the flowing of water in any part of the world. Similarly, human history too is moving in a particular direction due to certain specific laws. Human history in any country in the world—whether the people of that country reached a high degree of 'civilization' or stopped at a very primitive conditions—moves and has been moving according to the same law.

No event on this earth had happened suddenly. The discovery of the bow by human beings is not an event that happened in a moment or in a day. There are many hundreds and thousands of experiences behind it. Similarly, 'adding sour starter to milk to get yoghourt' is not a matter which humans learnt in a day. It is possible to know about yoghourt only after knowing many things like using milk, rearing cattle, and husbanding animals and so on. This is one aspect. Another aspect, for example, is that social values too do not emerge suddenly.

Let us consider 'conjugal fidelity or devotion or faithfulness to the husband'. Did this value begin along with the emergence of human beings, that is, during the period when humans, like animals, took shelter in the hollows of the trees? Humans were yet to protect themselves from animals and withstand the climatic conditions of heat and cold. They had to acquire the knowledge of food gathering. They had to have settled residence; should live as a society; should discover a relationship whereby one woman and one man live as wife and husband. The husband should find it necessary that his wife must remain loyal to him alone and not have sexual relationships with other men. Until then the thought of 'devotion to the husband' would not have arisen in human society.

Consider any value or any relationship, it will have some history behind it. There will be some reason for that. Some one must have needed it.

How did a creature called a 'King' emerge in history? What does 'ruling' people mean? What do actually 'people' mean? Who ruled during the period when there were no 'kings'? Has a king been in existence since the days when Humans lived in the hollows of trees? When did he emerge? Why did he emerge?

Who are ruling the people now? What is the connection between the present day rule and the rule of a king? Should some one rule people? There are answers to all these kinds of questions. What we all should do is to *keep our hearts and minds open* to knowledge and truth.

Humankind in the early days

The earth had rotated for about 500 crores (5000 millions) of years without a living being called a 'human being'. There were rivers, oceans, mountains, trees and animals. Still human beings had not come into existence! All these hundreds of crores of years, the Sun had been rising and setting. Rain had been falling. The moon had been giving light. Eclipses had been taking place. Cyclones had been happening. But human beings did not exist yet.

Human beings, that is human animals, emerged only after a long time. According to an estimate, it was only about five or six lakhs of years since human beings evolved out of the primitive human animal.

The primitive human beings used to live in groups and naked like animals in caves, hollows of trees and along the river banks. At that time human beings did not know anything about Nature. Fruit, roots and leaves were the food! Wounding a sleeping or running animal was the hunting of that time.

Fruit grow naturally on the earth without the efforts of human beings. Roots and bulbs grow in the soil. Fish in the lakes and animals in the forests are born and grow. All that human beings have to do is to gather them.

They have to climb trees if they want fruit. Or get them by throwing stones at them and bringing them down. This is one kind of labour (work). They have to dig out roots from the soil. This is another kind of labour. Digging requires some implement. If they grind and sharpen a hard stone, it is also a kind of labour. With this labour, an implement is made. If they dig the soil, they get roots. If they make a long spear with the branches of trees and hunt animals with it, they get meat.

All these fruit, roots and animals are available in Nature. Sticks, stones etc. are also part of Nature. All that human beings need to do is different kinds of labour (work). This process of doing labour had gradually transformed human animals into human beings.

Humans developed beyond the animal stage when they began to do small kinds of labour. Anthropologists have divided this process of development into stages called Savagery, Barbarism and Civilization.

We have to imagine that in the beginning, various kinds of stones and branches of trees served as implements and weapons. We have to imagine hollows of thick trees and caves were the places of shelter for humans. Cannibalism also was prevalent in this stage.

[This is the beginning of Savagery.]

During this period, there were sexual relations among all men and women in a given group. If a woman gave birth to a child and if that child were a male child, then there was a possibility of sexual relation between the mother and the son after some years. It was the same case with the father and the daughter if the child were a female one. The same was the case with brothers and sisters born to the same mother.

After some time, the discovery of fire was a great step forward. Fire would appear somewhere or the other in the forests in the form of the burning of trees. The discovery of fire is nothing but the grasping of the fact that fire is very hot, it burns everything, some activities are carried out by means of it and it can be made in a particular manner. Human beings raised to a stage whereby they withstood the climatic conditions by means of newly acquired nutritious food: roasted fish, crabs, roots and meat.

Humans had to keep fire always burning without extinguishing it. Gradually at some places, it became a 'holy fire' in the life of human beings.

[Discovery of fire marks the middle stage within Savagery.]

Next to 'fire', 'bow' occupies an important position. Human beings became superior to animals as a result of the discovery of the 'bow and arrow'.

Once they came to know about how to make a bow and an arrow, progress was made in acquiring food easily compared to the past. A new implement called the 'bow' began to be used for hunting. Hunting became a daily activity and a means of living.

[The discovery of 'bow and arrow' refers to the higher stage in Savagery.]

Making of saucers and pots with earth began, which means new articles that were not present earlier had now begun.

[The invention of making pots refers to the beginning of Barbarism.]

The raising of some kinds of birds and animals, and growing of plants etc., also began.

[Rearing of cattle refers to the middle stage within Barbarism].

Constructing houses with raw bricks began. After learning about cattle rearing, human beings wandered in bands in search of pasture lands and water resources. During this stage, people discovered light metals like copper and tin. Iron was not yet found.

[Discovery of iron took place in the last stage of Barbarism].

Until the middle stage of Barbarism, human beings of all countries in the world developed in the same manner. Thereafter progress occurred differently at different places. The differences in the natural resources determined the differences in the progress.

Until Columbus discovered America in 1492, human beings in America lived as savages. The reasons were: a lack of a variety of animals for domestication and variety of grains suitable for cultivation.

In the Eastern Hemisphere (Asia, Europe, Africa and Australia) there were many domesticable animals. There were many food grains (growing in the forests, independent of human effort) useful for cultivation.

Social Relations

Anthropologists, subsequently, depicted this life of bands of human beings as the system of Gens. This life of Gens began much before the middle stage of Savagery.

(Whether we call 'society', a 'set up', or 'system' — All these words mean the same.)

There was no change in the sexual relationships among bands of people at the beginning of this Gen society. There was no scope to think about who the father of a child born to a woman was. Primitive human beings were not aware of the fact that men are also responsible for the birth of a child. They used to recognise the children through the mother. That is, recognizing a child as the child of so-and-so woman.

Daughters and sons born to a woman; daughters and sons of those daughters; daughters and sons of those grand daughters — thus the offspring developed through women form into a separate group. This group also includes men. But there was no scope to recognise which man was responsible for the conception of a given woman and which man's offspring was a given child. A group of people which emerged from the female offspring of a woman is a Gen. An aged (living) woman in that group would be the mother of that Gen. All the children (both male and female) born in a given group belonged to that Gen. It was the mother's responsibility to rear children. Men in the tribe did not have the so called 'responsibility of a father'. Anthropologists called this system 'Matriarchy' (a system where the mother was the 'mistress').

A combination of some such Gens was 'Phratry' and a combination of some Phratries was a 'Tribe'. The entire tribe occupied a certain area as its own and lived there. Similarly there was another tribe beyond the borders of this tribe. Likewise, there were many more tribes in the surrounding areas. These tribes would have names like Wolf, Crane, Bull and Falcon. The Gens within tribes too would have different names. The name of the Gen would be combined with the name of the person to make the full name. (The present day family names and lineage names owe their origin to the names of these Gens).

There used to be constant fights between neighbouring tribes. These fights used to be mainly for such natural resources as fruit trees, pasture lands and water. When one tribe tried to occupy the territory of another tribe — to plunder the belongings of another tribe, hurt or insult a person of the other tribe — all the members of that tribe were equally responsible for protecting their tribe and taking revenge against the other. There was no male-female prejudice . All would fight for their tribe.

Administration in the Tribe

Organising the affairs of the Gen is Gen administration. Organising all Gens together is the 'administration of the tribe'!

The main aspects of this administration included gathering of food (by means of hunting, from the trees in the forest and cattle rearing), waging battles, and making truce or friendship with other tribes. These leaders would always mingle with all and be part of the tribe.

There would be both men and women among the leaders of the tribe. They were part of the tribe. These leaders would not have special rights or privileges.

In the course of time, it was these leaders of Gens and tribes who were worshipped as Lord 'Ganapathi'.)

When war took place between two tribes, the victorious tribe would either kill the defeated tribe as a whole, or drive them away to a far-off territory or some times merge them into their own tribe as equal individuals and give the name of some Gen and thereby recognize them as members of their Gens.

Marriage between different bands

Relations that were within a Gen in the past (the relations that did not go beyond the borders of the band) changed subsequently. There began a practice whereby one Gen established relations with another Gen (that is one band with another band within the same tribe).

If there were two Gens, Women of

the first Gen would have sexual relations with men of the second Gen and men of the first Gen with the women of the second Gen. This is a marriage between Gens. Some Anthropologists call it 'Group Marriage'. All women in the second Gen were wives of the men in the first Gen. All men in the second Gen were husbands of the women in the first Gen.

Due to this change, there began a ban on the sexual relations between mother and son. This is how it happened: In the past, there was a possibility for the mother and son to have sexual relations since men and women within the same group used to have sexual relations. Now, a boy born in one Gen, after becoming an adult, would have sexual relations with women of another Gen but would not have with women of his own Gen. As a result of this, man's sexual relations with his mother and sisters ceased.

But this change, however, did not yet take place in the case of sexual relations between father and daughter. Because, the man who was the father of a girl born in one Gen is in the second Gen. This girl, when she became an adult and had sexual relations with all men of the second Gen, would also possibly have sexual relations with the father.

When a change first appears in life, it does not mean that all people would follow it and old incidents do not take place. It may take several hundreds of years for a new change to establish itself. The old situation gradually recedes and disappears completely in the course of time. Thus if a particular practice occured very rarely at some place even after it had nearly disappeared, we call it a 'remnant'. Gradually these remnants also disappeared.

Property rights under the Gen system

A woman or a man in a Gen would necessarily have some personal belongings like stone implements and animal skin. They were the property of an individual as long as that individual was alive. Those articles would remain as property of the Gen after the death of the possessor and they did not belong to the other Gens.

Articles of a woman would go to her own offspring since the offspring remained in the same Gen. There was no scope for giving a man's articles to his offspring because his offspring would be in another Gen. As articles of one Gen couldn't go to another Gen, the articles of a man would not go to the offspring in another gen. (There was no scope for any man to recognize who his children were. It was a different issue). Therefore articles of a man would pass on to his siblings and the children of his elder and younger sisters (that is nieces and nephews since they remained in the maternal uncle's Gens.) Treating daughters' children as close relatives and sons' children as distant still exists in some regions. We may assume that this was a tradition of the Gen society.

'Pairing' marriage after 'Group' marriage

After the system of marriage between one Gen and another continued for a certain period of time (whenever we say a 'certain period of time', we may imagine several hundreds or thousands of years), a new custom called "pairing marriage' came into existence. This marriage would take place between a man of one Gen and a woman of another Gen (between two individuals only). The two become wife and husband.

Even after this 'pairing marriage', those individuals would belong to their respective Gens in which they lived before marriage. Neither the wife's name changed to the husband's Gen nor husband's name would change according to the wife's Gen. Recognition of one individual through another individual did not take place. Just as in the past, they belonged to their respective Gens and remained as independent individuals. Those, who became wife and husband through pairing marriage, did not have to give up sexual relations with others. Which means, the husband could have sexual relations with other women and the wife too could have sexual relations with other men.

If a woman who went through Pairing marriage got a child, there was no scope also to find out the father of that child. Because, women in this form of marriage would have sexual relations with other men also.

When a woman gave birth to a child, the man who was the husband of the mother of a child might or might not be the 'actual' father of that child.

A ban on sexual relations between father and daughter began in the Pairing marriage as follows: In a Pairing marriage, there would be a man and woman as husband and wife. If that woman got a child that man would be the father of that child. (whether or not he was a 'real' father). If that child was a female child, there couldn't be a physical relationship between that child and its father. Thus, that ban began.

If that father was the real father of the child. Then that ban would be a real ban between father and daughter. But, if that father was not the real father and the real father was elsewhere, then that ban would be a ban between two persons whose relationship is akin to that of a father and daughter instead of a ban between a real father and a daughter.

If we see the question of 'property' under Pairing marriage system, the property of the man, even here, would not belong either to his wife or the offspring of his wife even if those children were born to that father because the property could not belong to the other Gen. Since either the wife or her children belong to the other Gen, that property could not go to them.

If we view this from the children, those children couldn't get property from the father. They got property from their maternal uncle. In the Gen system, the maternal uncle was a closer relative than the father.

Religion in the Gen system

The leaders who governed the Gen used to act as priests. Every tribe had many beliefs, views and customs depending upon its experience and situation. Each one had its religious activities. They were not aware of anything about Nature. They considered lightning, thunder, rain, darkness, earthquakes, floods and such other things as super powers and worshipped them. Generally, gods in all the tribes were women. As women were goddesses of the Gens, the belief was that woman alone had super natural power. Marriages, birthday celebrations of children, making promises of offerings to gods that they should win against the enemy, victory celebrations, sacrificial offerings to goddesses, funeral rites for the dead, admitting the war captives into the Gen—with all such activities 'religion' began to emerge.

Adding certain things to what they knew about Nature and what they had heard from the elders, they, with their power of imagination, composed stories by creating myths of conquering Nature like living for thousands of years, flying in the air and bringing rivers behind them. Their wishes and imagination assumed the form of arts.

Development of knowledge under the Gen system

As the experiences connected with nature and life increased in the course of time, the capacity to think increased and human intellect began to flourish. Growing plants; making ropes and clothes with animal hair; drawing thread from cotton, inventing handloom — with such activities as these, progress of this sort began. All this had happened as a result of experience and knowledge of some hundreds and thousands of years. Discovery of metals, especially of iron was a wonderful development in the course of history. All the implements made of stone and wood in the past could now be made of iron. They could dig out huge rocks with iron, implements like crow bar, axe, and spade. They could fell huge trees and make the ground flat. They could till the land easily by means of iron ploughs. They could dig canals from the rivers to distant places. This is how cultivation began. The grain, originally grown for the sake of cattle fodder, had now become food for humans. The food problem receded since people came to know about using grain as food.

Thus, cultivation, getting food by means of hunting, getting milk by domesticating cattle, utilizing cattle for cultivation-related activities, getting meat and skins from them, building houses — all these activities were the most essential means of survival.

In all the activities connected with food, clothing, shelter and protection from the enemies, every individual of the Gen took part. All persons used to work. Duties and rights were equal for all. Relations of that time were so without the conscious awareness of the principle of 'equality'.

Production and Labour

All those substances and articles that were needed to satisfy the daily necessities constituted 'production'. Every kind of work that was necessary for 'production' was 'labour'.

Animals do not produce food for themselves. They depend on Nature only and live by eating whatever they find in nature. Human beings too lived like that in the beginning. But gradually they learnt how to produce articles and substances from the material found in Nature.

Land, plants, grains; birds and animals; metals in the earth crust; rivers and seas — all are part of nature. All are natural resources. All were given by nature. Humans have to learn how to use them. Human beings too are part of nature.

No human being has created Nature. Hence, no part of Nature belongs to any one human being. But any human being can use Nature, can build a shelter to reside in, can grow plants. Can use Nature for any need. But, no human being has any right to call it his own.

If we do any work to satisfy a need it is 'labour'. Another name for it is 'production activity'.

To do any labour we first need 'land'. Then, we need some 'implements'. These implements together with the land are 'means of labour'. Or 'means of production'. We can call them by any name: 'implements', 'instruments', or 'means'.

We can't get products just because we have means of production. If a man keeps a plough on the land and sits without doing any work, grains don't grow. If a woman keeps a pot on the bank of a river, water doesn't get filled into the pot. Human beings, in order to satisfy any need, have to do all kinds of work relevant to that need. They have to develop the modes of work through their experiences.

Either you say 'work' or 'labour' both mean the same. But activities like strolling along the river bank and two people chatting are not labour.

If we go by the meaning provided in the science of language, any movement is 'work' (verb, action). Roaming, eating, drinking, talking — every thing is work (actions). But here we cannot go by those meanings. When we speak of 'labour', all work is not 'labour'. Only those kinds of work, which take place in order to satisfy the necessities of life are labour. Hunting, making pots, milking, growing plants, weaving clothes, stitching garments, driving a cart — all such activities such as these are 'labour' or 'production activities'.

More work could be done in a given time if it is done with an iron plough instead of wooden plough. One can till more land. This means, the production by the labour of tilling has increased due to a change in the tools used. As the experiences grow, the productivity of all kinds of labour will increase.

We have seen that every person — women and men — performed labour under the Gen system. All people participated in the production activities. Hunting, raising crops, house building and such other activities were carried out collectively. Milking, driving carts and such other activities were carried out individually. The work was carried out in accordance with its nature.

To say that 'all performed labour' means every one was doing work for his living by his own labour. Hence all were equal. No one was either superior or inferior to the other.

If all human beings live at one place

as a band or group it was human 'society', 'social formation', 'social set-up' or 'social system'. Whichever name you called it, it was the same.

What was the nature of 'relations' that existed among human beings in human society? — We have to understand this fact properly

In the case of animals, we find only 'blood relations'. There aren't labour relations between one animal and another. But we find both the kinds of relations in the case of human beings.

Blood relations are natural. These apply to all kinds of living beings.

Labour relations are social. These exist only among human beings. In other words, 'labour relations' are those relations, which exist exclusively among human beings.

When we speak of 'human relations', reference to 'blood relations' is unnecessary. We have to examine only 'labour relations'. Which means, 'human relations' mean 'labour relations'. 'Human beings' mean 'living beings who labour' or 'labouring animals'. 'Human' means those who perform labour. If this characteristic is absent, human beings are also animals that live by eating grass.

Therefore, when we speak of 'human beings', we should remember labour and labour relations.

Since all persons labour in the 'Gen system', all were 'equal'. The relations among those persons were 'relations among equals'. Some Anthropologists called such a life 'primitive communism'. 'Communism' means 'system of equality'. Or an 'egalitarian society'. Human beings in such a society did not know the distinctions of equality and inequalities but the character of the labour relations among those people was 'equal'. Hence it is a communism of the primitive times.

'Division of labour' among men and women under the Gen system

First, we have to talk about the division of labour that exists now between men and women. Housework for women and outside work for men. Though women do outside work also, housework is their responsibility! This is the division of labour that has been in existence between men and women since time immemorial till today.

How did this division begin between men and women who were equals under the Gen system? There has been no unanimity among Anthropologists on this question. But, there is an explanation, which appears to be more logical. According to this explanation, the differences in the physical conditions of men and women might have led to some kind of distinction between their labours. The physical difference between men and women is only in respect of conception, lactation and the care of the infant child.

The primitive woman, however skilful she was at hunting, had to depend on others for food at least when she was pregnant. She had to have a shelter in a safe place where she could save infants from wild animals and enemies. Due to this reason, a kind of allotment of daily activities among men and women might have taken place. This appears to be more logical.

Women had to live in safe places and engage in such activities as rearing children, preparing food, gardening, handicrafts and rearing of cattle while men were engaged in such activities as hunting, wars with other tribes and cultivation. Though this division of labour originally arose out of the then existing conditions, there wasn't much change in the 'status' of women. The status of women did not become 'inferior' to that of men.

Although we are not able to understand definitely today how and when this 'division of labour' originally began, the division of labour between men and women has been like this from the beginning of the known history. By way of house work for women and outside work for men.

Exchanges of articles in the Gen system

Every tribe and every Gen within a tribe, produced some articles and substances such as implements of hunting, horns and skin of animals, wool, meat, fish, honey, milk and grain. If one tribe gave some of its articles to other tribes and took in return articles that were necessary for it, it was an 'exchange' of articles. These articles did not have a 'price'. Giving one article and taking another article in exchange. That was all.

Exchange of 2 articles implied that every article had some value. 'Value' means, total labour necessary to produce an article. The basis for value is 'labour'. But these facts were not known at that time. Not only at that time, the fact that 'labour is the basis of value' was not known for hundreds and thousands of years later.

Exchange of articles between tribes imply that the labour among human beings was mutually useful. In that way, labour relations formed among human beings.

In the beginning, all the exchanges took place in an arbitrary manner without any definite value calculations. Only gradually, after many experiences, exchange-ratios based on the kinds of articles began to emerge.

The exchange in those days took place at places near each other. These exchanges, gradually, led to the formation of 'money'. 'Money' is also an article. But it is an article, which functions as a mediator in the exchanges of all articles. Whatever article performs that function is 'money'.!

Along with money, prices, sales and purchases of articles began too. If we express the 'value' of an article through the measure of 'money', it is its 'price'. If we give an article and take money, it is the 'sale' ('selling') of an article.

If we give money and take an article, it is the 'purchase' ('buying') of an article.

This 'selling' and 'buying' used to take place face to face among the people of different Gens or tribes. There were no people called 'traders' or 'merchants' who 'bought' articles at one place, and 'sold' them at another place and earned some 'profit'.

The fall of the Gen system and the beginning of the 'exploitation of labour'

Seeds of slavery had fallen gradually within the Gen system.

Now the process had ceased whereby, in the course of battles between different tribes, the victorious tribe either killed the defeated and captured tribesmen or admitted them into their tribe as equals! There began a practice of turning the captured enemies into their slaves and made them work.

In the beginning, development of productive forces led to this change. This is how it happened: Let us suppose that the food gathered by a person, who had worked throughout the day — that is, the food that he had gathered by roaming around trees and by hunting — would be enough only for the maintenance of that person. Let us also suppose that there was no condition where more food could be gathered (produced). Under such conditions, it was not possible for a man to keep another man as his slave. Because, the master couldn't get any production through that slave. Suppose the master snatched away whatever little food the slave had gathered and did not give anything to the slave. If this happened, the slave would soon die without food. If the slave had to live, he had to eat some food out of what he produced daily. The master could take whatever remained. This meant, one group could keep another group as its slaves only when there were conditions where the labour of a person not only satisfied the necessities of life but also produced some 'surplus'. Productive forces have to be at that level. If such conditions are absent, (If there was no condition whereby one person could grab from what another person produces), slavery can not begin and there can not be any scope for it.

Conflicts and antagonism between tribes had been there since the beginning. They were like fights between animals. Along with the already existing antagonism, development of productive forces led to a system where enemies were converted into slaves and servants.

For the people who convert into slaves, the new situation is better than the old condition. Instead of facing defeat and dying in the hands of the enemies, the condition in which enemies were allowed to live for some reason instead of killing them, it was certainly progress for the person who might have been killed. Thus, this change was also a progress for the entire human society. But this progress began by way of slavery and servitude.

Slavery, which began from antiquity, ruled Europe until 2000 years ago uninterruptedly.

The household of the master and his slave's household together made up 'family'. Since all the slaves were the property of the master, all the slaves were part of the Master's family. Romans used the word 'family' for the first time. The word at that time did not have the present-day meaning. Now, family means wife, husband and children. (In a sense, the present day meaning is also like the old one. Wife and children are the slaves of the husband, aren't they?)

What sort of relationship was there between a master and his slave? It was not a 'blood relation'. It was 'labour relation'. But in this labour relation, a person did not exchange his labour with another. It was the master who always received the labour of the slave.

Though we don't have adequate data regarding the form in which masterhood and slavery existed in a 'tribe', we have to understand that 'slavery' had begun since the days of the tribes.

If we consider a tribe as a society, two kinds of living conditions began in it: some human beings were masters and some were slaves! It is only the slaves who do all the labour necessary to produce means of subsistence. Slaves have to work not only for the sake of their maintenance but also for the maintenance of the masters. This means, masters live on the labour of slaves instead of living on their own labour. Thus, the beginning of slavery implies the beginning of exploitation of slave labour by the masters. This is **exploitation of labour**! As a result, class distinctions consisting of labouring slaves as a class and labour-exploiting masters as another class began.

The households of the masters received many masses of products which male and female slaves produced by means of various kinds of labour. Those masses were the riches and wealth of those families.

On the other hand, a slave lost for the sake of a master's family, a large part of the products, which he produced, by working day in and day out. As the fruit of his labour did not come to him, a slave had to live with a small number of products. This is — dire poverty! Every slave lives in dire poverty!

Wealth — for the master's family.

Poverty — for the slave's family.

The root cause for the wealth and poverty in society is the exploitation of labour of the servant class by the master-class.

All this started a long time ago, hundreds and thousands of years ago!

The population of tribes used to go to distant places on expedition in search of rivers and agricultural lands.

Under these conditions of invasions, according to some historians, a tribe called Aryans entered India (this country did not have this name at that time) invading from the northern side. Horse-driven carts and cattle herds were their specialty. Aryans chased and pushed Dravidians towards the south and occupied the North. At that time, the Aryan social life was in the form of the Gen system. The Dravidians were living in the Gen system in some areas and in some form of slavery in other areas.

In the course of time, some tribes disappeared while some tribes developed further and split into many more tribes. As time passed, agriculture became the main source of livelihood and different tribes settled at different places.

The emergence of private property and disintegration of the Gen System

Due to the increase in the wealth of the Gens, collective households in a Gen had temporarily taken the responsibility of maintaining lands, plantations and cattle herds. Gradually, these properties came under the control of individuals. It so happened that a man (male member in a Gen) who was either rearing a herd of cattle or cultivating land (by making slaves do this labour) began to treat that property as his own and occupied the same. The violating of the rules of the Gen system began in this manner.

Along with the emergence of private property, all kinds of economic activities came into practice: earning of 'money' by the master-class from the sale of certain products produced by the labour of slaves; lending that money, charging 'interest' and taking others' properties on mortgage and so on.

When we speak of the 'rich and the poor', it does not mean that all those poor people were 'slaves'. They could be poor people without being slaves. (We cannot discuss all those details here).

The system of private property — where an individual possesses private property — got consolidated in the last phases of Barbarism. On the whole, 'exploitation of labour' in human history was totally opposed to collective living of the Gen system.

After the system of private property came into existence, the master-class (the rich class) needed a new arrangement called 'State' in order to sustain its property rights. The government, its laws, courts, prisons, the police and the army — all are parts of the 'State'.

This 'State' changed the form and character of the Gen system. According to this State, keeping slaves as private property, selling them, buying them and even killing them were 'holy' rights of the masters. Occupying land as private property was also another 'holy' right! Those who opposed these rights were anti-social and could be punished! This State is useful solely to the class or Masters.

It does not mean that this holy constitution (State) of the class of slave-masters was in the form of a book. Script (writing) was not yet invented. Much before the invention of 'writing', slavery and the State that defends it came into existence.

In order to implement newly introduced laws, the master-class needs 'physical force'. That is, the police and the army.

None of these institutions were present in the Gen system — since there were no classes.

Those who served as the police in the early days were slaves who were under the control of the maser-class. What they had to do was to defend the masters by suppressing other slaves!

During the period when the influence of the Gen system was still strong, serving the police and soldiers was considered to be a mean activity. But after the consolidation of the system of private property, serving in the police department, army and the intelligence department became a matter of pride. These jobs became free from the earlier social meanness and acquired a high 'value'!

The four fold army of the past and

the Central Reserve Police (CRP), State Reserve Police (SRP) and other forms of military of the present day are the subsequent forms of the original security forces.

In the new 'State' machinery, the system of 'taxes' too emerged afresh. In order to run the government (State), money is needed to pay salaries to the employees, maintenance of the soldiers and other expenses. People have to pay all these expenses in the form of 'taxes'. As these kinds of expenses were absent in the Gen system, there was no system of taxes.

Under this new State system, all the slave-masters pay taxes to the government. There is nothing which slaves pay in the name of taxes. But, since the entire money in the hands of masters was earned due to the labour of slaves, all the taxes which the masters pay is nothing but the money earned by the slaves.

The taxes which the masters pay run the government that protects their property rights. This government functions as an authoritarian force to suppress slaves. This means, the labour of the slaves (the labour which the master-class grabs from the slaves) functions as a force that suppressed slaves!

It was the slaves who performed all the functions necessary to suppress the class of slaves; it was the slaves who provided money to carry out all those functions.

But, no class realized all this.

Contradiction

Contradiction means conflict, opposition. If there is incoherence or inconsistency between two things or two situations, it means there is contradiction. There would be contradiction between class of slaves and class masters. Contradiction between classes does not mean conflict or enmity between two individuals. It is enmity between two groups. It is enmity between the living conditions and the interest of those groups.

If something does good to one class, it harms another class. A situation which gives comfort to one, gives discomfort to another.

Such a contradiction as this would not be solved by means of conciliation, negotiations or reforms. It would be solved only if the conditions become equal. If contradictions between classes have to disappear, classes themselves need to disappear.

Every person ought to do labour. All people ought to live by their own labour. Then we will and find master-slave distinction. There will not be exploitation of labour. Social conditions whereby all human beings live as 'equals' will form.

But, such a situation is still thousands of years away! Classes have emerged recently and they have to change into other forms. History has yet to pass a long way before a solution is found.

When we speak of the emergence of class distinctions in the Gen system, we have to assume the duration of the Gen system to be several thousands of years. We have to assume that exploitation of labour and hostile classes had gradually emerged. We should also assume that the beginning and the end of the Gen society were not of the same character.

Caste distinctions in the new society

There was no concept of the 'caste' under the Gen system. Although there were differences in the activities (occupations), they were part of collective living. There was no social hierarchy (higher position or lower position). All persons were members with 'equal' recognition in society. The new laws that defended 'private property' differentiated the rich class as upper class and the poor class as the low class. In course of time, there occurred division of labour in the lower class depending on their long standing occupations: cultivation, handicrafts and the lowest manual jobs. A further division into Sudras and still lower castes also occurred among these lower class people.

This institution of castes is seen only in India. Although class distinctions, caused due to exploitation of labour, exist throughout the world, what were the specific conditions that led to the manifestation of class distinctions in the form of higher and lower castes? The historians have not offered any satisfactory explanation.

We have to assume that, to the class distinctions in India, some specific conditions were also added and the higher-lower castes began. In the beginning, these distinctions took the forms of Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vysya and Sudra castes. These distinctions gradually expanded into hundreds of castes.

Right from the beginning, it appeared that only the lower caste people were extremely poor. Usually we don't find 'rich' people among lower castes. If at all there are any, such examples are very few. They are almost non-existent.

The rich and the poor are found among the higher castes. But the poor among the higher castes, do not experience social inferiority. Yet these poor also come under the poor class. These poor too are subjected to exploitation of labour by the rich class.

Man-woman relations in the new society

We have a kind of division of labour between men and women in the Gen system. In course of time, that division of labour led to a system where women were involved less in outside activities and more in household activities.

As men were involved in hunting, cultivation, rearing of cattle, wars with enemy tribes, they got opportunities, which women did not, to acquire 'property'.

When we talk of 'men', it does not mean that all men were in the same situation. Men who were slaves did not 'own' their own bodies. Such people did not have any opportunity at all to acquire property. Here we have to bear in mind only those men who could earn property.

We have to assume that, after the division of labour took place between men and women, men had opportunities to acquire property by their outside activities and women, who were confined to household activities, had no such opportunities.

Though household activities under the Gen system occupied an important place in collective consumption, they gradually transformed into something connected with a single family. Although some population among women continued to do outside work, housework became the primary duty of such women also. No labour performed for housekeeping converts into 'value' (money). Therefore, women did not get opportunities to acquire property as men did.

Thus, we have to assume that the division of labour, which took place between men and women for certain needs at a given point of time in history, led to contradictory conditions in respect of acquiring property.

It was the stage of Pairing marriage until man did not have 'property'. After property emerged, it led to 'monogamous marriage'.

Monogamous marriage: This form of marriage came subsequent to Pairing marriage. The main change in this form of marriage is that a woman could not have relations with men other than her husband. There was no such rule for a man. He could marry any number of times. He could have any number of wives, concubines or temporary relationships. But in the case of a woman who was a wife, her entire freedom was under the control of her husband.

A woman, who is a 'wife', should not have relations with other men. The reason for this rule was that she should not have children of other men. She should beget children only for her husband. The husband had to be the father of her children. This was an arrangement so that the man's property could go to his children!

There were no such conditions, during the period of 'Group marriage' and 'Pairing marriage', whereby man could acquire more property. There was no greater property than small articles like bows and arrows, animal skin, tusks, horns etc. But, as land and money too gradually were accumulated as property, there arose a need for inheritance of property.

Owing to the fact that a man acquired property and it had to be passed on to his children, many new conditions were imposed on the woman.

According to the conditions, immediately after the marriage, the Gen of a woman changed and she belonged to the husband's Gen there after. Children would belong to the father's Gen instead of the mother's Gen. Father's surname would be their surname. Thus, due to monogamous marriage, in respect of the recognizing of women and children by society, a change took place whereby a woman was recognised as 'wife of so and so man' and children as 'children of so and so man'.

Monogamous marriage ordained many more rules for woman. Conjugal fidelity or devotion or faithfulness to the husband is the most important rule. A woman should always be modest and obedient to the husband. She should worship her husband as God. She had to live under the control and commands of the husband. She should never abandon the husband throughout her life — All such rules and regulations led to a custom called 'devoted commitment' or 'conjugal fidelity to the husband'. (pati vratyam)

Man did not have any of these restrictions. He was a free man. He was the master of woman! He had full powers over the woman!

If a wife was disobedient, the husband had the right even to kill her.

After the introduction of these kinds of rules of monogamous marriage, unventilated dark houses, which barred the entry of other men, began to emerge in the rich households of their women. Girls of these families had to move in these dark rooms from a very young age, wait for the future husbands and learn how to live in 'chastity'.

The duty of the female children was to beget heirs of the property of the men whom they married. Just as cows deliver female calves! If it is cows, they have to deliver female calves! But if it is human cows, they have to deliver male children only. Because, only male children, not the female children, had the right of inheritance of the father's property. This was a system which kept women away from property and rights. A practice, whereby girls didn't have rights of inheritance over the father's property but merely received a limited property in the form of dowry and gifts.

If he didn't have children, a father could transmit his property to a male child from within his own 'Gen' in the name of 'adoption'.

The private property of a man replaced the then existing matriarchy by patriarchy. 'Patriarchy' means, a system whereby father (instead of mother) would be the 'ruler' over their children. Not only over the children but also over the mother of those children! That woman is the 'wife of so-and-so man!' Those children are the 'children of so-and-so man'!

Prostitution: Prostitution in society is a consequence of the consolidation of male supremacy due to the private property of men. Men of the victorious tribes used to have sexual relations with women of defeated tribes.

A religious concept that it is a pious act of god if a woman pleases a man by establishing sexual relations with him had begun. For this purpose some women used to remain as 'servants of god' (*Deva dasis*) and make men happy. In the subsequent period of time, men began to give lands for their maintenance. In course of time, these women gradually expected money from men who visited them.

If a man could afford to maintain a prostitute on his money, he would keep that prostitute as his 'concubine' to prevent her from having sexual relations with other men. Depending on the economic ability and social status, a man could have any number of concubines. The difference between the wife and a concubine was that children of the concubine didn't have the right of inheritance. They would live on the mercy and charity of the rich father.

The emergence of prostitution in society implies the transformation of some women into 'loyal wives' and some into 'prostitutes'.

Beggary: Once there was wealth on the one hand and poverty on the other in society (that is, once 'exploitation of labour' had begun), the process of the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer continued. The lowest strata of the poor would reach the stage of starvation. As a result, many kinds of offences arose. Especially, offences like burgling of the houses of the rich. If the poor do not have any means to survive, it became a grave danger to the rich class. One of the ways by which the rich class escaped that risk was to give alms and charity to the poor. The lowest form of it is — throwing alms!

It appears as if the alms-giver is doing that act with great kindness. But it implies 'self-protection'. It means that the charitable persons are telling the poor: "Look! We are not obliged to give alms to you. Yet we are giving you alms sympathizing with you since you are poor. Live with satisfaction at our mercy! Don't eye our wealth".

However, while the majority of the people in the rich class do not give alms or charity, very few people give charity. Due to these people, the poor get alms at least temporarily. Therefore, those who give alms and charity are 'kind' persons.

Those who give alms and charity do so for the sake of 'name' as welll as with the belief that they would get 'piety'.

This does not mean that while all these changes were taking place due to private property system, the sufferers of these changes had accepted the changes happily. No change took place without the opposition and defiance of the sufferers. To suppress all the opposition and defiance, the rich class established a new State and administration.

The consequences of the system of individual private property

(1) Masterhood — slavery. Exploitation of labour.

(2) The Class of masters is the class of the rich. It is the class that rules. The Class that does the labour is the 'poor class'. It is the class of the people. Thus, human beings split into two classes.

(3) Masters began to make the slaves work and they stopped doing any work. Since then working became 'mean act' while living without working became noble.

(4) The rich class had all the rights, the Labouring class all the duties.

(5) Patriarchy replaced matriarchy. Conjugal fidelity to husband and prostitution emerged among women.

(6) Hierarchical relations (of superiority and inferiority) between man and man (between the male master and male slave); hierarchical relations (of superiority and inferiority) between women and women (between female master and female slave); hierarchical relations (of superiority and inferiority) between man and woman (between men and women in the family).

All the remaining changes that have taken place in society are connected with these main changes.

All these features — which cropped up due to the system of private property — appear in traditions, and morals which any religious text in the world literature preaches.

We are going to see all these features in the *Ramayana* also, as we proceed further.

The Army of Pens

The class of masters did not accomplish all the changes required to consolidate the system of private property only by means of coercion. Coercion does not work on all occasions. A different kind of teaching is also necessary in order to make a slave subservient to his master and a wife to her husband. The class of masters has to teach the oppressed in such a way that they are subservient voluntarily.

It was none other than the poets who shouldered the responsibility of teaching people modesty and obedience in the interest of the rich class. They were not an army of swords. An army of pens. (There were no pens at that time. They did not even have needle like pens to write on palm-leaves. There was no writing system as yet. Every thing was oral propaganda. This was still the stage of Barbarism. The writing system did not begin until the stage of civilisation.)

This army of pens consists of individuals belonging to the rich class. They are mainly priests (in any country) who are concerned with religious matters and activities. The stability of the rich class was their interest. Their duty was to wipe out the old ideas of the spirit of collective living of the Gen system from the minds of the people and to spread and retain the new values. They had to make women hate their own freedom and *lick the feet of their husbands* with obedience and subservience. They had to make sons worship not their mothers but fathers with fear, devotion, obedience and modesty. They had to make the poor feel that their poverty was their misfortune and be reconciled that their birth in lower castes was their bad luck. They had to make prostitutes feel that their profession is very pious. The following are the wonderful weapons, which the army of pens created for the sake of these mental changes. (1) The deeds in the past birth. (2) Sin and piety. (3) Heaven and hell. (4) Birth and Rebirth.

The Gen system had no need of any one of these things.

The concepts of past deeds (*karma*), rebirth (*punarjanma*), sin and piety, heaven and hell created new, religious beliefs - which are totally false and ignorant. The class of exploiters want people to live in this ignorance and keep their faces toward heaven and hell. Of course, the class of exploiters also live in ignorance. But this ignorance does not harm the rich class as it harms the poor class.

For a long time, 'religion' has become a wing that serves the rich class.

These religious preachers acquired the knack of teaching whatever there was to teach to the people.

For women — If they remain devoted wives and serve their husbands, they would earn piety and go to heaven. Many stories were told to teach this! Examples of women who had attained this were enumerated in the stories.

For slaves — If they were faithful to

the masters and served them with a pure heart, they would earn piety and go to heaven. Many stories of servants who had got salvation in this manner were recounted!

For the poor — If they behave with modesty and obedience without jealousy and hatred toward the rich, they would earn piety and would be born as rich people in the next birth. Examples of this were also given.

Whatever was useful in the interest of the rich class was termed a blessing and whatever harmed them was sin!

They pushed the fellow human beings to the point of begging, attributed great meaning to beggary and created a god for it (*Siva*). Religion attributed godliness to beggars by saying, "all beggars are gods".

Who composed all these stories? It was none but poets. They prepared numerous religious stories that defend the rich class and the male domination. The stories which fools wrote determined to make people fools.

In the early days, women and children leaned towards hell. They violated everything and committed all sins: fights and disobedience. But in course of time and in course of habit for thousands of years, people became subdued and drooped their heads with helplessness. They surrendered totally from the bottom of their hearts. Women forgot the very thought of 'freedom' and reached a stage of wonder at the stories (*by pressing their cheeks*) that 'women in the past were not devoted wives'. The poor people looked towards the coming births so that they could commit pious acts and take the birth of rich people.

With this all the stages of the Gen system are over. Hereafter we can forget about it. This Gen system which had been there until the consolidation of individual private property was Matriarchal. The same was called '**Primitive Communism**'. The Gen system was born in the middle stage of Savagery, reached the higher level in the last stage of Barbarism and ended at the beginning of Civilisation.

Bow and arrow — symbol for the Savage man.
Sword — symbol for the Barbaric man.
Gun powder — symbol for the Civilized man.

The system of exploitation and shameless culture

In any society we find three spheres. (1) The Economic sphere. (2) The Political sphere. (3) The Social sphere. These three spheres have an intimate connection. All these three spheres function with the same aim and in the same direction.

The Economic sphere: Many kinds of labour have to take place for human beings to live. Land and other means of labour are necessary to carry on labour. Everything connected with the 'means of labour' and 'labour relations' among human beings constitutes the 'Economic sphere'.

Whatever be the nature of the economic sphere, the same is the nature of the political and social spheres.

In the Gen system, the economic sphere did not have the nature of exploiting labour, the other spheres too were of the same nature. There were no 'politics'. In the social sphere, there were no rules of inequality.

After the exploitation of labour began in the economic sphere, politics and social values that defend it began.

Whether it is the society where there is no exploitation of labour or where there is exploitation of labour, the totality of ideas connected with all spheres is the 'culture' of that society.

If we consider the entire world, we find the same kind of culture in any country or region where there are exploitative labour relations. We find the rich-poor differences every where. We find male domination and female subordination every where. We find prostitution, beggary and crimes every where. We don't find a place where there are no religious beliefs. All these features are present everywhere. Therefore, cultures of all regions are the same. However at some places there may be some specific conditions. For example, caste distinctions in India. While this specific situation exists here, there may be other kinds of inequalities at other places.

If there are any differences among cultures of different regions, they are simply connected with the dress, the language, food habits and such other kinds of practices. If women of one region wear saris, women of other regions may wear gowns and women in yet another region may wear trousers. Whatever be the dresses of different regions, we find rich-poor differences among all. We find rich-poor differences among the women who wear saris. Similar differences will be there among women who wear gowns also. The same is the case with the third kind of dress also. All these kinds of differences are superficial differences. The essence of the matter is that cultures of all region are the same.

The term 'exploitation of labour' applies only to the exploitation that takes place in labour relations. But when there is exploitation in those relations, there arise relations of an exploitative nature even in political and social spheres.

If we consider the question of 'caste distinctions', a person belonging to the Brahmin caste may think himself to be the most superior person. "I am a superior person. All the low caste people are inferior. All of them must respect me". This man acquires these ideas through the exploitative set up. Since a Brahmin, who holds such ideas, enjoys many rights which people of other castes do not have, he is an exploiter socially. This inequality among human beings is an 'effect' caused by the foundation of exploitation.

Whereas 'exploitation of labour' is not an 'effect'. It is the 'root'. As other spheres also possess the exploitative character, due to root cause called 'exploitation of labour' in the sphere of economy, one can refer to political inequalities as 'political exploitation' and social inequalities as 'social exploitation'. But, we must always bear in mind the economic cause called 'exploitation of labour' *is behind* these political and social spheres.

If we consider the man-woman question, the same gender relations which we find in the rich class would extend to the poor class also. Man (of any class or caste) is an exploiter who exploits the rights of women.

If we compare a poor man with his master, the poor man is certainly not an independent person in terms of their relation. He has to follow the commands of the master. But if we compare the same poor man with his wife, he is an independent person in that particular relation! He is the master of that woman! The fact that the husband is the master of the wife means, man is exploiting the rights of woman. Thus, exploitation that takes place in all spheres and all relations constitute 'holy culture' of that society.

Ruling ideas are people's ideas!

Regulations concerning conjugal fidelity of women and obedience to father's commands of sons had arisen only from the 'law' of inheritance of property. Male domination is connected with the property of the male.

Although men of the poor class did not have any property, the ideas of the rich class became the ideas of the poor class in course of time. Since the rich class is the ruling class, its influence will be on the entire society. Ideas of the ruling class are people's ideas! The ruling culture itself is people's culture!

Even the poor class male expects that his wife should not look at other men and be a loyal wife and his children must not violate his commands and be obedient. Just as husbands of the rich class impose restrictions and dominate their women, husbands of the poor class too do the same on a large scale.

Here, there is a point which requires clarification. To say that 'man turned woman into a loyal wife, became an authority over her and curtailed her freedom', it does not mean to say, 'woman should have relations with other men. Such relations constitute freedom. Woman should have such freedom'. Here criticism against the man is that he retained his freedom of flirting with other women but turned his woman into a loyal wife!

If a man and woman are husband and wife and if you say a wife should not have sexual relations with other men, the husband too should not have sexual relations with other women. A relation between such a wife and husband is the right kind of man-woman relationship without any contradictions. But, we can not imagine such an ideal relationship at a time when the system of private property of the man was emerging. But the domination of woman by man began due to the possession of private property. It also happened in the case of the propertyless poor class.

Just as men in the rich class do not do any labour, women of that class also do not do any labour. They stay away from the production activities carried on outside. Women of the poor class participate in the outside labour. They also participate in cultivation as well as handicrafts, which means, in a position in which they can support themselves to some extent. Yet, a poor woman is subordinate to her husband. The rich class culture, its ideology influences the minds of the poor class.

The Cultural Army

There exist various kinds of arts in society. Music, poetry, acting, painting and such others. Since all the artists are born and brought up in a society based on exploitation, they too hold the same ideas. They express their own ideas through their arts. If we consider poets separately, they are the army of the pens. We may call all the artists 'cultural army'.

The cultural army brainwashes the army of swords with cultural ideas. Each of the morals, which they propagate, is sharper than a hundred swords. We can see for some thousands of years in the future (that is, even now. In the present society as well) the wounds and the deformity of the soul which these 'moral swords' caused.

The Emergence of Kings

In the exploitative society, forts and towns arose. Some tribes jointly occupied certain territories and all such territories came under the rule of a single tribe. Victorious tribes began to make the defeated tribes as their subsidiaries. The whole territory under the rule of a tribe emerged as a 'kingdom' (State). Its head was the 'king'. The kingdom might have been very small or big. It was an administrative territory within certain borders.

We may call a kingdom 'a country'. Whether we call it a kingdom or country, it is an administrative territory.

The king had some land as private property. The slave population that raised crops in that land and other multitude of servants would be under his control. In that kingdom, just as the king possesses, other rich people also possessed their own lands and the poor people would cultivate those lands. The purpose of the king's rule is to protect the class interests of the rich only.

A 'king' always tried to invade neighbouring kingdoms (territories), waged wars and occupied those kingdoms (lands) also. The rich of the victorious country would distribute the occupied lands among themselves and earn more money from those lands. Next, they invade other kingdoms.

The king who was able to occupy many territories was called a 'great king', 'great warrior'! If he conquered many kingdoms, he would be an 'emperor'!

It is the kings who appear as wonderful heroes throughout the religious stories! All people (both rich and the poor) had a craze for the 'king'! It is a craze for his official status and the heaps of his riches and wealth.

If you want a story — it would be about the king! Once upon a time, there lived a king! If there were no king, there would be no story.

People go into ecstasy recalling the wars which kings waged long long ago. They narrate the valour and bravery of kings as holy stories. But what does 'war' mean? Killing the people of other countries! By branding them as 'enemies!' What will happen after the war? The victorious rich class occupies the lands, confiscates gold and silver and even people as their properties! The businessmen of the victorious country conduct business in the defeated country and increase their profits. The essence of the matter is: a transfer of power of the rich class of one country into the hands of the rich class of another country!

The people of the defeated country too accept the victorious king as their new king and adore him as they do while offering camphor to a deity. Of course, it didn't make any difference who the king was. What was the new loss for people if the king changed?

What are the advantages for the ordinary people and the soldiers of the two countries from a war? What new wealth would fall on them? Whether won or lost, soldiers would have to remain again as soldiers. They had to wage wars all their life for the sake of kings or die in wars or escape from the war with lost limbs, didn't they? This is what they got. "This is my country, my land, the neighbours are my enemies. I will fight even by laying down my life. Victory or (heavenly) death!" —Unless this kind of cultural disease entered their brains and made them stupid, which soldier would lay down his life for the sake of his king?

Is it necessary to recall and exult over the war between Rama and Ravana? The devotees are stricken with uncontrollable grief when we hear Rama and Lakshmana lost their consciousness in the war. What about the thousands of soldiers who lost their legs, hands in every battle and whose heads rolled on the battlefield? Thus except hardships, unrest, suffering and alarm, ordinary people are not comfortable with wars, whichever king wages them.

What does it mean, when somebody says a king in India ruled well? That king waged wars, plundered other countries and enhanced the wealth of the rich. He enhanced the profits of traders. He performed sacrificial rites as per Vedic principles. He donated many things to Brahmins. He saw to it that the poor remained poor; servants remained servants and beggars as beggars. He saw to it that prostitution increased. He took all measures to prevent the mixing of castes. He saw to it that women were not free individuals; that soldiers participated in wars loyally—Thus, he saw the country become affluent. Who would benefit from the rule of such a king? For whom did it do good? Why, then, do we raise questions like, "Was he an Aryan, or a Dravidian king?

What did Rama do? What did Ravana do? What did Ashoka do? What did Chandragupta do? What did Srikrishadevaraya do? —These are not the questions that we need. What did kings actually do? We need to raise this question.

Today, when we read stories concerning the valour of kings — whether that king is Rama or Ravana — we need not go into ecstasies. A king, whoever he may be, is a representative of the rich class in a given society! It means, that class has given him the power to rule on their behalf. Delegating the power may not have taken place by means of the present day election system. No individual can remain in the place of a king without the support of the rich class.

Religious literature or Puranic literature

Much before the emergence of kings in history, all countries had literature and art. The invention of writing (script) and production of literature in the written form began during these stages.

This literature became popular as 'religious literature' and 'mythological literature'.

'Vedas' were the first literary texts in India. *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* etc., came subsequently. We find the remnants of the Gen system very clearly in these texts. But, these texts do not defend those remnants. When we examine the stories of these religious texts in an order, we can see at least some of the characteristics of society of that time.

Now, see how man-woman relationships (as depicted in the stories of the religious texts) have been changing.

Stories about women without husband and children without a father. Stories which tell that society recognized children as natural even though a woman gave birth to children without marriage (e.g., story of Jabala).

Stories that found fault with women who gave birth without marriage (e.g., Kunti giving birth to Karna and abandoned him.) Stories about women who gave birth to children by having sexual relations with other men but with the consent of their husbands (e.g., Kunti gave birth to children because of Yama, God of wind and Indra. Vali, Sugriva and Hanuman were born due to men other than those whom their mothers married.)

Stories in which the husband feels happy when his wife 'slept' with the guest and entertained him well (e.g., story of Sudershana and Oghavathi). Stories about women goddesses.

Stories about the leader of the Gen. Stories in which sons worship only the mother (e.g., Kausalya while asking him not to go to the forest, tells him the story of Kashyap who worshipped only the mother and hence reached heaven.) Stories of Diti, Aditi and Vinati in which society recognizes children through the mother. Stories about children who stay back with their mother when parents separate (e.g., Ghatotkacha stays back with Hidimbi without going with Bhima, who was his father.) Stories in which woman gives birth to a child through another man gives away that child to that man and lives with the husband as before (e.g., Tara gives birth to a child through Chandra, gives away that child to Chandra and continues to live with her husband as before).

Stories of sons who hesitate as to whom they ought to respect, the father or the mother. (Gautama and Gautami are husband and wife. 'Chirakari' is their son. The mother 'sleeps' with the guest as per the tradition to honour the guest. Father gets angry and orders his son to kill Gautami. The son does not find fault with the mother. He feels that his mother followed the old tradition and hence hesitates to follow his father's order. In the meantime, the father too cools down and does not insist on his doing it. This means, although patriarchal values began, they were not strong.)

Stories of women who secretly meet their lovers without the knowledge of their husbands (e.g. Krishna and Gopikas).

There are many stories of leaders of Gens who oppose collective living. In the remote past, all the gods performed Yajna (sacrificial offering) collectively. They made Vishnu the leader of the Yajna with an overt understanding that all of them should distribute the fruits of the Yajna equally. After the completion of the Yajna, Vishnu refuses to distribute it to all. Gods attempted to fight a war with Vishnu but according to the principle of Yajna none can except the leader of the Yajna possess weapons. All the gods, who did not possess weapons were afraid. Then Vishnu thinks that he had no need to fear of enemies and hence he kept his bow vertically on the ground, put his chin on the edge of the bow and stood in a carefree manner. All the gods called white ants and asked them to chew off the string of the bow. As soon as the ants bite the string of the edge of the bow springs up with great force and chops off Vishnu's head. Thus, the gods succeed. This is the story and it reflects the property conflicts under the Gen system. As there were many people who wanted collective living, Vishnu faced defeat. As the individual private property began to consolidate itself, Vishnu becomes the leader of the rich class and we come across stories where he becomes the head of the entire society.)

The stories of caste distinctions. Stories in which a Chandala (a person of untouchable caste) could not reach heaven. Stories that prevent Sudras and women from receiving education.

There are stories of charitable persons who acquired fame by giving charity.

The stories about relations between gods and godly prostitutes and between kings and royal-prostitutes.

The stories showing how the miracles and greatness of women-gods receded and male-gods grew in prestige.

The stories about sons who disobeyed their mothers and revered their fathers. The stories of children who received punishment from their fathers for disobeying him (e.g., Viswamitra curses his sons).

The stories according to which sexual relations with men other than husband became partially a crime (e.g., Ahalya) and totally a crime (e.g., Jamadagni and Renuka are husband and wife. Their son Parasurama fully obeys the father and kills the mother). There are stories about boons to the wife if she does something that makes husband happy. There are stories of performing penance to bear sons (In no story, daughters are born. They are born only after the hero is born because he needs a wife). There are stories about dead fathers whose souls linger on the trees as they did not have sons who could have released them.

There are stories about money lending business (e.g., the story of Harischandra. This story preaches 'commitment to truth', which means clearing of debts along with the 'interest'. There was a law in the ancient Roman constitution which says, 'clear off the debt even by selling wife and children. If some thing still falls short, sell yourself and clear the debt". This is the story of our Harishchandra. The borrower, in order to repay the loan with interest, has to turn into a slave. Such insurmountable are those 'interest' calculations!)

There are stories about kings who donated '*Sudra*' (low caste) women (the slave women), who were under their possession to *Ritviks* (priests performing rites in sacrifice) and Brahmins.

There are stories of women who turned into '*pati vratas*' (women faithful to their husbands) and sons into '*pitru vaakya paripaalaka*' (who obediently follow the orders of their father).

The stories which tell that some people are born servants and slaves (For example, when the sea of milk was churned not only Apsaras, the heavenly nymphs but also woman-servants emerge).

There are stories which tell that a king who does not perform sacrificial rites and a soldier who runs away from the battle field would face the consequence of a great sin which an upper caste person faces when he serves the low caste people.

There are stories that defend splendour and luxury on the one hand and 'renunciation' on the other.

Stories such as these are innumerable! Thus if we examine critically all the stories of religious texts and mythologies, we may find the trend of history to some extent. This does not mean that these stories were composed exactly in accordance with the evolution of history.

Most of the mythological stories reflect one or the other stage of the past time. (This does not mean that the poets composed these stories after doing research into the evolution of history. It also does not mean that we have to equate these mythological stories with scientific researches. These researches, however, provide considerable amount of information to these researches. We may relate these stories to a considerable extent with the evolution of history).

Just as an old stony sword or pieces of a pot that have been excavated yield information concerning the lives of our ancestors, these stories too give us such important information that enable us to understand history.

These sorts of stories are not confined to India; they are found at all places. All countries in the world have this kind of literature. Since the history of all countries passed through these stages (of collective living, establishment of private property, propaganda of new culture etc.,), all countries have the same kind of literature.

Just as Rama in '*Ramayana*' disregarded his mother's wishes, the hero in the Greek mythological work, '*Odyssey*' too humiliates his mother. Just as Dasaratha in '*Ramayana*' sleeps with Sudra (low caste) wives and concubines, the army commanders in the Greek text '*Iliad*' choose women according to their hierarchy. We find this kind of resemblance between literatures of all countries. Because, the basis for their creation is the same. Now, we get an answer (because, now, we know the evolution of history to some extent) to the question, 'how did all this literature arise?'

In '*Ramayana*', all the women characters exhibit freedom to some extent. Kausalya and Sita unhesitatingly criticise Dasaratha and Rama respectively. They make arguments and counter arguments. Tataki's fight, Kaikeyi's courage, the 'loves' of Ahalya, Shurpanakha and Ayomukhi—all these are remnants of matriarchy. But these characters themselves voluntarily and obediently surrender to Patriarchy in the same stories.

The character of Lakshmana reflects slavery. 'Obedience to elder brother's orders' is a literary guise.

It is needless to say any thing about Rama's character. This character is crowded with all the cherished values of society. Ignoring mother and revering father, dominating the wife, ruling people despotically and defending the system of the rich → Rama's character is a reflection of all these aspects.

When we think of Sita's character, we feel, "What a great loyal wife!" What does loyal wife mean? How does a woman become a loyal wife?

Loyal wife: At the time of feudalism, 'harems' emerged as residences for rich class women. Every rich fellow arranged the inner part of the house in such a manner that no male fly could enter it. Servants and slaves guarded it from outside. (In many countries they used to convert male slaves into eunuchs (impotent) and use them as guards of the harem. Women inside the harem, eunuchs and female servants guarding outside — all were living in the conditions of slavery. All were subject to the coercion of the rich male). Women, who lived in the dungeons of the house did not have any connection with the outside world. They couldn't have seen any thing than their fathers, brothers, husbands and maternal uncles in their life. Even with their family members, they talked once a year, that too standing obediently behind curtains and hanging their heads down. As those husbands could have many wives, concubines and many affairs, it takes one year to visit one wife.

It is about these unfortunate 'creatures' that our shameless poets made senseless gibes like "the girl that has not seen the sunshine", "she glittered like flash at the window of the harem" and circulated these gibes for thousands of years as great poetry. But no poet anywhere has described the girl who had not seen the sun suffered from anemia or that women who did not satisfy their natural desires suffered from epilepsy throughout their life or that many women violated social norms for the sake of freedom and went to the gallows or harems were degenerated with animosity, revenge, disease and ill-health.

A Loyal wife was nothing but the vulgar form of a woman who emerged out of these gloomy, dark conditions, and from these mental and physical ailments. Women surrendered to the value and reputation which society gave them if they turned into loyal wives. They reached a stage where they voluntarily invited restrictions, orders and the domintion of men over them.

"Husband alone is the god for woman. She has no world other than obeying the orders of the husband. She must always be subordinate to man with modesty and obedience. She must worship the husband irrespective of his nature: debauchee, thief or merciless. A woman has only one man as a husband in every birth"—This kind of insane preaching has been assimilated into the blood, atoms and souls of women.

Loyal wives are those who do not run away even when their shackles are removed. "Our feet and hands are naked. Bound us with shackles. Shackles alone give beauty to our bodies"—This is how women reached the stage of asking for shackles and treating them as ornaments!

This lowly and degraded situation of women is due to the mythological stories which the poets created. The poets and artists, by means of their poisonous morals, fake values and deceitful hopes, have restricted women's social activities and independent behaviour and destroyed their souls from their very base. (The same poets who wrote morals for 'loyal wives' also wrote, with the same pens, voluptuous techniques and *Kama sastra*, science for sex for the prostitutes!) The role which the poets have played was to prepare for men loyal wives on the one hand and nymphomaniac women of the other.

Obedience of sons for fathers became a great social value. A son, who received property from the father, was bound to be obedient toward his father. If the son did not show obedience, the father might not have given his property to the son. The property relationship itself binds sons to fathers. Devotion for father had become a sacred duty in the early days. The 'mother' was a non-entity in the context of father's property.

Sons always take the side of their fathers. They serve and worship only fathers. They do everything to please their fathers. Sons become old for the sake of an aged father by transferring their youth. For the sake of an aged father's future, his hundredth marriage, a son gave up his property rights and remained unmarried so that he wouldn't get children to demand his property! (The story of Bhishma.)

The entire story of Ramayana, from the beginning to the end, is a struggle for the property (the kingdom) that comes from the father.

Do we have just a few such stories? The same stories seen throughout the world religions. Great poets have filled literature with millions of stories.

Here we need to examine the concept of 'loyalty to the husband' from another angle. While discussing this concept, a surprising fact reveals itself.

'Loyalty to the husband' that began from women is the first stage that will lead to a higher stage in the man-woman relationships in history, namely, 'one man and one woman' (Monogamy). When this change takes place in the case of men as well, the man-woman relationships attain a higher stage.

Had the system where the wife has relationship exclusively with the husband not begun, the 'actual father' of the child would not have found a place in society.

The custom according to which the wife ought to have a relationship exclusively with her husband will lead to the custom according to which a man ought to have a relationship exclusively with his wife. When both of them follow the same rule, it becomes a relationship free from contradictions. Such a man-woman relationship will stabilise the position of the father. It puts an end to 'adulterous' relationship. Thus, this will establish a highly refined human relationships between men and women and parents and children. But, the custom of 'loyalty to the husband' had begun with unbearable violence against women. Just as Slave system was a progressive change in society at a particular point of time, loyalty to the husband among women is also a progreesive change in the course of history. To argue this way, however, does not mean that we are defending the violence and cruelty which were perpetrated against the slaves in the name of 'slavery' and against women in the name of 'chastity' and 'loyalty to the husband'. However, a beginning to attain relationships without compulsion and cruelty had been made by means of compulsion and cruelty!

Thus, as a consequence of exploitation of labour that emerged after the Gen system, the state of the rich class and its head the king, a class rule that oppressed the slaves and restrictions on women had begun.

In the early days, the question of 'democracy' did not arise. For that we have to still travel hundreds and thousands of years into the future.

Different social systems in history as a whole!

When viewed from the perspective of 'labour relations', we may classify human history into the following stages:

(1) **Gen society**. (Exploitation of labour is absent. No classes.)
(2) **Slave society**. (Beginning of slave society. Beginning of classes.)
(3) **Feudal society**. (Exploitation of labour continued.)
(4) **Capitalist society** (Exploitation of labour continues.)
(5) **Socialist society** (Beginning of transformation toward the elimination of Exploitation of labour.)
(6) **Communistic Society** (End of Exploitation of labour. Continuation of labour relations of equality.)

Why do these changes take place in society? What aspects of labour relations cause these changes in society? — If we want to understand these issues, we can do so by means of **Marx**'s '**Capital**' only. Here we cannot see all that. We have to talk about it very briefly.)

If we want to understand how justified is the story in a religious text (e.g.

story in Ramayana), we have to know some more things in addition to the history which we have already seen.

Unless we know the nature of society, we cannot properly understand either a story, its characters or the values which they represent. Therefore, we need to see some more issues concerning society.

We have observed that human beings have split into two classes since some human beings stopped doing labour.

When we speak of 'class society', we have to assume that the entire population in a given society (men and women, young and old, rich and poor) are part of all those classes. There is none who does not belong to any class.

(Here, we cannot go into more details.)

All countries have the same kind of history — history that is characterized by exploitative relations of labour. That is history involving enemy classes. But, that history too varies a little depending upon the conditions of the individual countries. Each country had its own 'specific' history. People of each country ought to examine the history of their own country and understand its classes and its stages. But, when there is exploitation of labour, histories of all countries 'generally' move through the 'same kind' of stages with a certain difference.

The term 'democracy' did not begin until capitalist society.

Today many countries in the world have capitalist parliamentary societies while some countries have feudal societies, where still kings are ruling.

Some countries took only the first steps in socialism and again turned back to capitalism.

Communism is still a distant ideal. It is still in the 'imagination' and in the form of theory only.

In this 'human history', *Ramayana*, the text which we have taken for study, represents a literature of a feudal society. But, it includes the features of the Gen system and the slave society also. The present day capitalist society also *holds it on its head* in reverence.

Since 'exploitation of labour' had begun much before religious literature like Ramayana and Bharata, we have to start examining all the earlier forms of exploitative society. Only if we know about them, we will be able to understand the exploitative features of this literature. Similarly, only if we know about the present day capitalist society, we will be able to understand religious literature like Ramayana.

As exploitation of labour has started from the slave-owning system, we have to begin with that system.

Enemy classes in 'Slave society'

Slaves and slave masters are enemy classes. The entire land belongs to the master class. (Land is part of nature. None has produced it by means of his labour. None has the real right to occupy it as his property.)

In the slave society, there were not only the 'means of labour' but also 'human beings who do labour' for their masters. Payment of 'wages' by the master to the labourer had not yet begun here. The portion that is spent on the subsistence of the slave out of the products produced by the labour of the slave is akin to the 'wage' of the slave. But that portion does not have the name 'wage'. After deducting the portion that goes to the slave in order to keep him alive, the entire remaining portion of the products goes to the family of the slave master.

If we deduct the portion spent on the slave from his labour, the remaining is 'surplus'. It is 'surplus labour'. If we see it in terms of 'products' it is 'surplus production'. If we see it in terms of money, it is 'surplus value' (surplus money).

If we consider the totality of slaves and the totality of slave masters, the class of slave masters lives on the 'surplus labour' of the slaves.

But, no class realised this exploitation of labour at that time. Because at that time, there were no calculations of money for any labour or production. Slaves performed many kinds of labour beginning from cultivation to the household chores for the sake of families of masters. What is the value of products produced by their labour? What portion did the slaves receive from the total value? What portion did the slave master get after the slaves received their share? — As there were no such calculations in terms of money at that time, there was no scope to understand either 'surplus labour' or 'surplus value'.

But, credit, interest and trading commission had begun in slave society. Here the term 'land rent' did not yet exist.

Although the rule of the slave masters that suppressed the class of slaves was in vogue, slaves did not stop fighting their masters. Struggles that took place between classes are 'class struggles'. In course of time, after many thousands of years, the struggles of slaves alone enabled them to get rid of slavery. But, the exploitation of labour remained as before.

Enemy classes in 'Feudal society'

Here landlords (feudal lords) and tenant farmers (feudal peasants), who do labour on the land and raise crops, were enemy classes. Here, all the properties of the class of masters over the means of labour remained as before but some of their rights over the labouring people decreased. Here, the term 'land rent' arrived into property relations. The practice of paying 'Wage' for the labouring person had not yet begun.

The tenant farmers rented the lands which the masters owned, grew crop, paid the rent to the landlords out of the crop and supported themselves with the remaining production.

Labourers (tenant farmers) do all the labour. After deducting a portion necessary for the subsistence of tenant farmers from the total crop out put, the entire remaining portion went to the master (Landlord).

Here also, none of the classes knew the fact of exploitation of labour.

Class struggles took place here as well.

Enemy classes in the Capitalist society

Here a 'productive capitalist class' emerges afresh. In the society, landlords and capitalists are different sections within the exploiting class. Its opponent class is proletariat (labourers or the Working Class).

In this society, payment of 'wage' in the form of money for the labourer begins.

Further, most part of the production which the capitalist gets produced by labourers would go into sales. Every product would have a 'price'.

The capitalist, invests some 'capital' (on the means of labour and wages), gets commodities produced by labourers and sells them. After deducting the initially spent expenses (capital) from the money received through sales, there remains some money as surplus. This is distributed in the form of 'interest' and 'profit' for the capital and in the form of 'rent' for the land on which production activities are carried out.

Here, every item has definite money calculations. What is the value of the commodity? What is its expenditure? How much surplus value remains? (This means, it is possible to calculate the portion that goes to the capitalist from the labour of the workers).

It became possible to discover the secret of exploitation of labour only under capitalism wherein the system of payment of wages to workers began and calculations for all factors that produce commodities was possible. **Marx** accomplished this task.

It became possible to understand the past societies as well as the future society since it became clear that it is the surplus value of the labourers which is distributed among the masters (capitalist class) in the form of interest, profit and land rent.

If we stand in the midst of a capitalist society, and look at the past societies, we can understand the fact that all that happened in the slave-owning society and feudal society was 'exploitation of labour'. With this understanding we can understand classes and class struggles in the past societies.

Similarly, if we stand in the midst of a capitalist society and look at the future, we can also understand how it will be possible to eliminate exploitation of labour. The working class has to liberate itself from the exploitation of labour by the master class (capitalist class). It has to wage struggles with necessary knowledge.

Land, which is under the control of the master class, is also part of Nature. It belongs to none. Except land, other means of labour and money are also produced by the labour of the working class. Thus, whatever appears to be the private property of the master class is nothing but the private property of the working class.

Every person must do labour for his maintenance. If a person lives without doing any labour, it means he is living on others' labour, that is, on the exploitation of labour. Therefore, **the way for**

the working class to liberate itself from the exploitation of labour is to abolish private property rights based on which the master class is receiving land rent, interest and profit as its income and living without doing any labour. They have to make the master class perform labour compulsorily. This is possible only through class struggle of the working class.

When everybody does labour for himself, there won't be a need to exploit others' labour. When there is no exploitation of labour, there won't be classes. There won't be master-worker distinctions. Ultimately, it will result in a classless society with labour relations of equality. It is the Socialist society that will initiate changes.

Exploitation of labour has been going on for hundreds and thousands of years. But it became possible to understand it only in the capitalist society.

Even if a society which carries on the exploitation of labour changes in various ways, it is merely a change in the form. Like the past exploitative societies, the capitalist society is also an exploitative society.

Landlords and capitalists are part of the same class (exploiting class). They did not know this fact earlier. In the beginning they considered each other as enemy classes. At the time when capitalism was newly emerging, many struggles took place between the capitalists and the landlords who wield political power. Because, capitalists needed labourer to work on wages for their industries. The entire working class population was engaged in the cultivation of lands of the landlords and other kinds of labour, which were necessary for them.

Capitalists, for the sake of their industries, tried to break the bonds between the landlords and tenant farmers as far as possible.

In the early days, the landlord class felt that the development of the capitalist class was detrimental to its interests.

Kings, feudal lords and the clergy began to levy heavy taxes on their industries and imposed restrictions on the freedom to trade in order to suppress the capitalist class. As the right to make laws, authority to rule, army and everything was under the control of feudal governments, the situation reached such a stage in which the capitalist class could not develop unless the feudal class domination was destroyed.

Initially, capitalists tried to remove all the restrictions by peaceful means like petitions and refusal to pay taxes.

None of these attempts could move the feudal governments. Hence, the newly emerging capitalist class chose the path of fighting against the feudal class (its government). It encouraged the revolts of the working class against the king. The peasants and the handicraftsmen who were fixed in the feudal shackles acted in favour of the capitalist class.

Capitalists waged armed struggles against the feudal rule with the support of the people. These struggles continued for centuries.

For the first time, in the 17th century, the capitalist class in Britain defeated the feudal class, killed King Charles 1 and captured power. It became the ruling class, made laws necessary for its development and freed itself from the feudal shackles.

Later, at the end of the 18th century, the capitalist class in France also defeated the feudal class and came into power.

In course of time, capitalist governments came into power in many countries.

But, this did not happen in India as it had happened in Britain and France. Here the capitalist class did not come to power by waging struggle against the feudal class. Capitalism began in India as a result of the British capitalists' occupation and the rule of India, which was then under the rule of feudal kings.

The capitalist class, which once appeared as revolutionary in Britain, soon came to terms with the feudal class and revealed its real face. The two classes very soon got united. In fact they were not two different classes. They were merely two different groups within the same class (exploiting class).

Out of the 'surplus value' extracted from the Working class, the band of capitalists swallowed a portion in the name of 'interest' and 'profit' while the band of landlords swallowed another portion in the name of 'land-rent'. These two bands lived by exploiting the Working class without themselves doing any labour.

The common enemy of these two bands of fellows was — the Working class! In order to suppress the Working class, all the groups within the exploiting class had to be united. This understanding gave a new power to the British capitalist class. The British capitalist class, which once killed the feudal king, had again handed over the throne to the same feudal kings amicably. Since the beginning of the electoral system and parliament system of the capitalist rule in Britain, the capitalist parliament and feudal monarchy have been working hand in glove even till today. The fact that the British capitalist class gave the feudal kings a place in their power is a proof of the unity of the two bands.

The so-called king who had emerged in the slave-owning society is still in existence in the present day capitalist society as well.

The people in the capitalist countries are still so backward in their consciousness that they tolerate the kings and queens and their luxurious life.

The love stories of the kings, which change every week, fascinate the people like romantic stories.

Another name of the capitalist is the 'bourgeois'. Another name for the capitalist society is the 'bourgeois society'. Whatever term we may use, it is the same.

The Capitalist society outwardly appears to be revolutionary compared to the earlier societies. Because, the system of 'wages' for labourers begins only in this society. The system of 'holidays', other rights in respect of working conditions begin. Politically, elections, democracy and parliament replaced feudal autocracy. Compared to the earlier societies, these kinds of changes are progressive in a sense even with reference to the Working class.

Owing to the introduction of machinery under capitalism, women and children too got opportunities to work in the mills.

There began a gradual receding of superstitious beliefs like caste distinctions that were ossified in the earlier societies in countries like India.

It is possible for people belonging to different castes to stay at a distance from one another and do labour in agriculture and handicrafts. But, caste distinctions cannot remain ossified as in the past while working at the machines or traveling in the public transport systems.

Further, there was not any obstacle in the way of doing labour in the past societies even if the labourers were not literate. But, some amount of literacy and certain kinds of technical training were required for those labourers who worked with the machines (small or big) under capitalism.

Thus, under capitalism, certain changes, which may be called 'progressive', necessarily began. But, all the changes created favourable conditions for that class. This mode of production encouraged only such changes which it needed and to the extent that it needed.

"Down with male domination over women! Women are not rabbits in the kitchen! They are not slaves of men!" if such new slogans are raised in the capitalist society, the objective of such slogans is to enable women to live as independent individuals. It enables the capitalist industries and other establishments to secure female labourers cheaply.

Slogans like 'down with distinctions of caste, religion and race!' also belong to the same category. Exploiting class would get some benefit from such changes also.

If the slogans of the capitalist class aim at genuine liberty and equality, that class would not at all remain as a class of masters or owners. Unless he deprives the liberty and equality of labour, one cannot remain a master. If a person who is a master talks about liberty, it means he is talking about his own liberty.

But although progress in the capitalist society is meant for the interests of the capitalist class, its effects do not remain in the originally intended limits. Those ideas lead to further progress. The capitalist class cannot stop that process.

Attempts to get rid of the feudal conservative ideas also constituted a march toward progress. The progressive intellectuals and social reformers who were inspired by the capitalist slogans were able to break the feudal ideology.

But such a progress, which is based on the foundation of exploitative relations, did not continue for long. It necessarily stopped *after ten steps*. Even under capitalist society all the ailments of earlier exploitative societies continued to exist.

In this society where exploitation of labour is present, class distinctions and riches and want remained as before.

Although, parliamentary democracy replaced monarchy, it is nothing but capitalist democracy. The members of this class alone could utilize those rights.

Instead of a king, Prime ministers and presidents sat on the thrones. What happened under their rule was also the same — defending the exploitative labour relations and the property rights of the exploiters.

The state and its administration that suppressed the Working class would become consolidated. Here, the working class began to face a new problem called 'unemployment'. This problem was not present in the past societies.

Although, master-slave relations between man and woman have changed to some extent, male domination is still *ruling the family*.

Prostitution of the earlier times degraded into a permanent profession. The degraded situation that insults women has been turned into a profession and given legal permits (licenses) in the capitalist society. The capitalist society turns women of the working class into paupers and allots the profession of prostitution as a means of livelihood.

The rich become richer and the poor became poorer. People who lived on beggary and as orphans increased further.

The entire culture is an exploitative culture; with minor changes! Belief in heaven and hell turn into belief in good luck and ill luck. Desire for the nymph '*Rambha*' will turn into a desire for a female film star. The theory of rebirth remains as before. Instead of 'sages', god-men (*Babas*) emerge. Instead of penance, these god-men teach how to peep into your souls. Scientists still bathe in the sea on the day of eclipse. Women reduce their attendance to woman-specific religious ceremonies and reach a level of attending 'parties'. Feudal superstitious culture flourished under the aegis of capitalist commercial culture.

Literature too appears to have changed. That too not in 'essence', only in 'form'. As the men of the past epoch could not grasp the forces of nature, they used to be importance for physical valour and miracles of penance. The stories of valour of the ruling class individuals have become themes in poetry. But physical valour doesn't find place in capitalist literature, as it doesn't fetch wealth. Plundering through physical valour has barbaric value and exploiting others by means of academic degrees, business and other tactics had become a civilised practice. If the hero in the feudal stories went to heaven on a wooden horse or a miraculous carpet, the bourgeois hero visits foreign countries in airplanes. In the literature of both the periods the principal characters do not belong to the poor class. If the husband in a feudal story suspects the chastity of his wife, he curses her to turn into a stone or a rock, a husband in the bourgeois stories either shoots her with a pistol or divorces her. The content is the same at both the places. Thus, there are only differences in form not in the essence between the past exploitative societies and the present capitalist society in any aspect — except capitalist-kind changes!

Love and marriage

Either in the slave-owning society or the feudal society, love was not the basis for marriage. (This does not mean that men and women were not aware of 'love'). Only in the capitalist society, there is a scope for marriages based on love.

In the feudal society, women used to choose or expect valorous men as husbands since the physical valour of men had been the means of waging wars against enemies and accumulating wealth.

In the love stories of princes, what women wanted was the valour of those men and the riches and wealth which they got through that valour. What men wanted was the economic and physical force.

The marriage of Rama and Sita was also akin to this. Rama's valour was the reason for their marriage. If Ravana had had that valour and had won Sita in that bow competition, Sita would have married Ravana only and would have slid behind the curtains if she had come across Rama, thinking "Oh, this is a man other than my husband (*para purusha*)."

If someone argues that "Rama alone had that valour to break that bow", then it is a matter connected with the strength of the bow and valour of Rama and not love between Sita and Rama. What is present there is simply 'duty of a marital relationship' which they learnt from the culture that kept women obedient.

As there is some amount of freedom and education, progress of few steps in the life of women and some change in the other social customs, mutual acquaintance and 'penance of love' begin between men and women before marriage in the capitalist society. Instead of matrimonial alliances arranged by parents, men and women give priority to their own choice. But, if we pierce into the nature of the so-called love, it doesn't exist independent of the boundaries and norms of society.

Suppose a young man has a strong belief in the caste system. That is he has more admiration for his own caste. He likes a young woman of his own caste, but his elders do not accept that relationship. He may decide not to give value to the wishes of his parents in the matter of marriage. He may think properly, "I am the one who has to live with her. This is matter concerning my personal life. The question of others' wishes is not relevant here". Disregarding the opposition of the elders and giving priority to his own wishes, he may marry that girl. Although his 'love' could reject the authority of the elders, it stopped within the limits of 'caste'. He cannot imagine marriage with a girl of another caste. Which means, his love doesn't transgress the limits of 'caste'. He has the weakness of stopping at those limits.

Suppose, another young man does not observe caste distinctions. He can easily reject caste distinctions. He liked and married a highly educated and working woman belonging to a different caste. Yet, we have to argue that even this liking or love is within certain limits. Can he like or love an illiterate girl from a labourer's family? Will he develop love for a woman living in such a situation? (This does not mean that he must develop love for such a woman and it is an offence if he doesn't do so!)

'Love' develops depending upon the nature or features of society. If its nature is very narrow, love also submits to its narrow limits.

The so-called beauty, health, education, property, occupation, employment — all these are criteria which society sets up. In a society based on exploitation, only a few people possess them. The majority do not possess them. In such a society, if a young man or woman is healthy, it is not their personal achievement. They have had opportunities to possess it. They have good food, good clothes, clean housing, tensionless arrangements and an economic situation that provides everything. No such opportunities are available to the working class families.

Suppose a young man has talent in playing *Veena* (lute). Let us also suppose that a young woman likes him for his talent. This is also similar to education. Young men in the very poor families don't have opportunities to learn Veena or other means of art. A few hundreds will have opportunities which millions do not have. In the name of love, one has to choose some one from among those few people. In a society where everybody does not have equal opportunities, this selection will remain within certain limits.

Choosing a person for marriage with real freedom is possible only in such a society in which all people have all opportunities. In such a society, there will not be traditional restrictions or boundaries which people cannot surmount.

Let us see this point differently. A young man liked a young woman. Another man assaulted her sexually. Suppose the man who liked her now develops an aversion for her. Then we have to conclude that his love is based on the traditional concept of 'chastity of woman' and not on the love he has for her.

Similarly if a woman stops loving a man because he lost his riches and turned poor, it means her love until then was for his riches and not for him.

In this manner, love exists within many limitations depending upon the ideas which the society gives.

'Lovers' who come close through love, overcome ordinary difficulties and marry very soon sink into a 'traditional married life'. Lover first turns into a husband and then into a master. Beloved into wife and then into a servant! Love vanishes without leaving any trace.

This is the answer to the question, "Why love marriages also fail?" Love marriages also face conflicts for the same reason (male domination and female subordination) like the arranged marriages. It is not enough if a man and woman have mutual attraction when domination and servility exist in man-woman relationships, love also surrenders to the same values.

But, blind belief dullness which women of feudal society exhibit toward married life begins to reduce among the women of the capitalist society. Correspondingly, sense of domination and arrogance among men of feudal societies reduces among the men of capitalist societies. But this reduction is not very distinctly different. The capitalist society is also an exploitative society based on man's property. Even in this society, there are conditions which make women depend on men for their maintenance and protection. Therefore, man-woman relations in this society too have the same old characteristics.

Capitalist wars

The terror called 'war' did not leave the lives of human beings even in the capitalist society. Capitalists compete among themselves to sell their commodities throughout the world, invest their capital throughout the world and secure labourers and raw materials from different countries cheaply. These competitive attempts lead to wars. One war necessitates another war, more intensive than the previous one.

If the wars in the past societies were waged with sticks and swords, the bourgeois wars are waged with 'civilized' guns and bombs. In this (capitalist) society, just as productive forces develop to an unimaginable level in all sectors, the war forces that destroy other countries also develop.

"War" is a three-letter word only. But its terror, ugliness and destruction are beyond description. The quarrels that began between tribes when human beings were in the stage of animality don't recede even in the capitalist society. Moreover, they intensify competition among capitalists of different countries to grab 'surplus value' from the world proletariat which leads to wars.

A bomb falls on an infant child whom the mother is breast-feeding it in her lap in a hut in a remote hamlet. Why? For the sake of selling commodities of some capitalists! For more profits!

These bombs won't spare even the Hindu ascetics who sit in the forests and do penance and say, "I am not concerned with this world. My exclusive concern is with gods". The bombs keep in touch with all innocent people. No living being in Nature can escape from these bourgeois wars.

Such a beautiful world this capitalist society is! This is a continuation of the slave-owning society. It is a continuation of exploitative labour relations.

In the present day world, capitalist relations prevail in all the countries. Nowhere do we find slavery where the working class does not still have wages. Similarly, nowhere do we find a pure system consisting of tenant farmers only. (The working class of each country has to examine the class relations found in its own country).

Land rent, interest and profit for the master class and wages for the working class — only these relations exist everywhere.

In some countries, monarchies not based on elections and in some countries bourgeois legislative assemblies based on elections reign. In essence, the class of masters suppresses the working class in the name of 'rule'.

If we don't understand these facts which have been in vogue since the past, we cannot understand literature of either the past or the present.

The Working class has been fighting with the master class since the beginning. But, those struggles could only transform the Working class from one form to another. (They transformed slaves into tenant farmers and tenant farmers into workers.) But, the struggle that it wages after becoming aware of the exploitation of labour ought not to be like the earlier struggles. It ought to be a struggle that stops exploitation as a whole. The Working class should ensure that another class doesn't exploit it.

Now, we should imagine such a society also. That is a communist society. Its first stage is — socialism,

Human Relations in the Communist Society

This new society begins either as socialism or some other revolutionary stage that precedes it. It is able to eliminate class distinctions totally after some more stages.

In such a society, we may imagine human relations as follows.

(1) All people do labour (work). We don't find some people as 'masters' and some as 'labourers'. Master-labourer relations disappear. Then all people are 'producers'. There is no 'exploitation of labour'.

(2) There is no right of exploitative private property. No one has any right to receive rent from land, interest and profit from capital as their income. Each person has his own labour as a means for his livelihood. The capitalist individual property transforms into collective property. When an individual does not have property rights, the question of inheritance of property does not arise.

(3) As land or capital is not anybody's property, the roles played by them undergo a change. They remain merely as 'means of production' instead of being resources that fetch income to their owners. Competition among industries, heaps of commodities, hunt for markets, finally wars — all these conditions will disappear. Production and consumption are based on needs and in accordance with a plan.

(4) Owing to the absence of exploitation of labour, there are no distinctions like riches and wealth on the one side and poverty on the other side. The division of labour, which has been there since the past time in exploitative societies and which divides individuals hierarchically in terms of mental labour and manual labour and labour of men and labour of women will transform into socialist division of labour. This transformation will formulate labour relations that depend on the principle of 'equality'.

(5) According to the division of labour of past societies, the entire house work was the responsibility of women. It was the responsibility of those women who worked at jobs (outside the home) also. If division of labour has to change in accordance with the principle of equality, both men and women must do both housework and outside work. Because of this change, more burden concerning housework will not fall on women. Child rearing and the care of the old will not be shackles for woman but turn into pleasant activities for both men and women.

(6) Since equal economic conditions and equal rights exist, a situation will emerge whereby women live as independent individuals. As women can look after themselves, there will not be a situation whereby women have to depend on men either for their upkeep or protection. Thus, the basis for male domination will disappear.

(7) In order to identify a person in society, a given name and a family name (one specific name, one collective name) are essential. If we want to identify a child, it can have its own name. There is no problem about it. But what should the family name be? In the past societies, in the beginning, children had the name of the Gen of their mother. In the subsequent periods, they got the name of the father's Gen. The same continues even today. Notice any country or any region, the family name of the children is derived from father. It is a feature of male domination. Hence, this must change in accordance with the principle of man-woman equality. Deriving the surname exclusively from the father or exclusively from the mother is contrary to the principle of equality. Symbols connected with both the parents must be the family name of the child. Then it proves to be right that derivation of the surname of the child should be a combination of the actual, given (first) names of the parents. The surname plus the actual (given) name of the child would be the full name of the child. (I have discussed this question in an article (in Telugu) titled: '*What is the right way of deriving surnames?'*)

(8) According to the culture of past societies, rights over the children are vested in the father not the mother. Till today, father alone is the caretaker and master. If this situation changes in accordance with the principle of equality, both mother and father will be caretakers of the children. Both of them would have equal rights and equal responsibilities. As 'masterhood' should not be present in any relationship, neither the mother nor the father is the master of the child. They are merely 'parents'. As one individual should not become the master of another individual, masters and masterhood must not be present in 'society'. When all the relations of exploitative societies change, the language of those societies will itself change.

(9) When poverty is absent in society, ailments like prostitution, beggary, crime, and punishment will disappear.

(10) In all the societies since the past times, marriages depended on mainly on property in land, money, dowry, gifts, traditions like caste and religion, likes and dislikes of elders. But in the new society the married life of young men and women will depend only on their friendship and love. Relationships will remain stable.

(11) We have seen that due to the system of private property of man and for transmitting that property to his children, the value of 'conjugal fidelity or faithfulness to the husband' had emerged. When the system of private property and rights of inheritance are eliminated, will a situation of primitive times -- where there were no restrictions on man-woman relationships -- reappear. No, it will not happen. Because, the relationships of those primitive times were like animal relationships. Developed human refinement and relationships of animal lust are not compatible. The old kind of relationships leads to many contradictions. [I have discussed these contradictions in my Telugu book: '*From Inequality to Inequality!*'] Even though value of the 'faithfulness to the husband' began with due to private property of man, not all its features will vanish when that system of property is eliminated. Only those features, which make woman a slave of man, will vanish. They ought to vanish. The feature that a 'wife's relationship is limited to the husband' will not vanish. This feature should remain. In addition to that, the feature that a 'husband's relationship is limited to the wife' will also be established. The relationship of such wives and husbands will be free from any compulsion and depend on mutual love. Such relationship alone is rational. The emergence and continuation of man-woman relationship based on mutual love and friendship indicate high-level human refinement. Features contrary to this have to vanish.

(12) All the past superstitious notions connected with religion will weaken. In the past, people used to pray to gods, as they were not aware of the solutions for their problems. But, here, people will witness that, without the kindness and charity of any god, all the hardships are overcome and problems of the past kind do not arise. People will understand through their experience that all the problems are connected with the exploitation of labour only. With this new knowledge, the grip of gods and religions over the people will weaken. All such beliefs as good-luck and bad-luck, astrology, rebirth, heaven and hell will evaporate. Worshipping gods will stop. Temples would transform into schools or hospitals.

(13) We are imagining a society without classes. When there are no classes, the question of one class oppressing another class will not arise. In societies based on exploitation, the exploiting class rules in such a way that it suppresses the working class. After socialism that eliminates exploitation begins, the working class will begin to rule in order to abolish the property rights of the exploiting class; to make even the exploiting class perform labour and to change the old division of labour and thereby the working class will control the exploiting class. This is the class struggle, which the working class ought to wage in order to protect itself (self-protection). By means of this struggle, the process of dissolution of classes will begin. Gradually, classes will disappear. All people in society would become *associated producers* without the distinctions of master and labourer. When there are no classes at all, there will not be any need for ruling with which an enemy class is suppressed. Then society will have natural needs of organizing processes of production and distribution. It will not be like 'class rule'. The Class State itself will vanish. All its wings will disappear.

Thus, exploitative society will have

to transform into 'communist society' through class struggles. Equality is its goal.

Goal of 'progress'

Suppose antagonistic contradictions in labour relations vanished and labour relations attained the nature (quality) of 'equality'. Next, what should happen? How long 'progress' should proceed? If society reaches a stage where antagonistic relations vanish and equality is formed, what should happen next is that the equality should continue firmly.

When the health of a person is very sound, it need not improve further. If there is any thing wrong with the health it should be improved. When there is no problem with the health, what is needed is that it should continue in a sound state. This applies to the progress in any issue.

We should not assume that there is no end for progress and society will progress further and further. Any society will progress until its antagonistic contradictions vanish. After such a situation forms, the same situation will continue thereafter.

In such a situation also, there will be 'friendly or non-antagonistic contradictions'. They arise temporarily under certain conditions and will be solved through discussions and experiences. Thus, conditions in society keep changing even in such a stage. Those changes will also be in accordance with equality and be merely a continuation of the then existing condition.

If any slight change that is opposed to the character of 'equality' takes place, it will again lead to 'inequality'. There, antagonistic contradictions will again emerge.

Once relations of equality form, the same situation ought to continue stably. It is the duty of either the individual or society to continue that situation.

It is communism since it removes the basis that gives rise to all kinds of problems in exploitative societies.

Thus, the communist society will sing the final verse of permanent farewell to the 'exploitation of labour' going on for several millennia.

Moral principles of exploitative societies

Look at any religious text, we find hundreds of morals in it — more particularly in the *Ramayana*. In this text, *whoever opens his mouth*, does not shut it without preaching a hundred sharp morals. They (the characters) open their mouths only to preach morals. In order to understand their morals, we have to be acquainted with the following kinds of morals.

When we hear an exploitative moral, we have to imagine how it has to transform in the context of relations of equality. For example, see some of them.

- "Don't be jealous of others' riches and wealth"

As soon as we hear it, we feel, 'how good these words are!' But, why do some people alone possess riches and wealth? Why don't all people possess them? When people with riches and wealth enjoy comforts and joy and those who do not possess them face hardships and sorrow, how is it possible not to feel jealous of those who possess them? When we are ignorant of class distinctions, we don't find any thing wrong in this moral. But this moral tells that the poor should not be jealous of the rich. This is a moral that protects the class which possesses riches and wealth from the poor class. It is very safe for the rich if the poor do not feel jealous of them and hate them.

But if this moral changes in accordance with the principle of equality, it will read like this: "Not only a few people but all people must possess riches and wealth. Nobody should possess so many riches and wealth that it creates a feeling of jealousy in others.

- "Love your enemy as you love yourself"

This moral also protects the rich.

Enemy and love are two opposites. The two are irreconcilable. One does not occur where the other occurs.

Slave and master are enemies.

The moral 'love your enemy!' is meant for the slave and not the master.

If the master loves his slave, he cannot keep the slave as a slave. He has to free the slave and give him an equal place beside him. Then, the master will not at all have any life! Hence this moral is not intended to tell the master, "Free your slave".

This is meant for the slave only. This is to teach the slave thus, "Don't fight with your master! Increase your love for your master! Serve him with love!" Because of such morals, it is the slaves who become obedient toward their master and masters will not free their slaves.

Saying, "Love your enemy" amounts to saying, "an enemy exists". It is inevitable. Yet you have to love them. But it is not possible to love enemies while there is enmity among human beings.

In fact, love ought to be present in all human relationships. There is no conflict between 'love' and the communist morality. But love among human beings is possible when all their relationships are based on justice! Instead, if those relations are based on injustice, it is not necessary for a victim of injustice to love the person who has been unjust to him. If he does love him, then it is like harming himself. It won't show him the path of freedom from that injustice. Hence, in any Class society, love of the Working class toward the class of masters is meaningless! It is self-betrayal!

Only when there is no antagonism in human relations, friendship and love are possible in all aspects. Hence, the hypocritical moral, "love the enemy" will change like this: "If you don't want to hate other human beings, see that hostile relations do not exist between you and them. Fight against the antagonistic conditions". This moral applies to all antagonistic conditions. This will eliminate hostile relations.

- "Turn the other check if somebody slaps you on one cheek!"

This moral encourages those who slap and oppresses those who receive slaps.

A person who keeps quiet when somebody slaps him will keep quiet even if somebody exploits him. He will not know how to come out of that situation.

Hence, this exploitative moral will change like this: "when another fellow raises his hand to slap you, break his teeth!" This is a moral for self-protection!

- "A woman must have obedience. A servant must have loyalty. People should have patience in hardships!"

This moral will have to change as follows. Not only women and slaves but every person should possess the qualities of 'obedience, loyalty and patience'. Instead, if some one insists that only some people exhibit them, then their actual meanings will change: "Obedience is the character of lowly people. Faithfulness is a dog's character. Patience is a donkey's character"

- Feudal and capitalist societies describe charity as a great pious act.

But in the communist society, none would have the need to live from charity. Charity there would amount to treating a fellow human being as a mean person and insulting him. Receiving charity would become a mean activity without self-respect.

- "Don't tell lies".

This is meant to make borrowers to repay the debt with interest! But is exploitation not a big lie?

- "Don't steal!"

There should be protection for the properties of the rich from the poor, isn't it? But, grabbing of 'surplus value' by the class of masters from the class of labourers itself is a big theft, isn't it? What bigger theft is there than this?

Still, we have innumerable morals of this kind! If we hear them in isolation, all of them are very good. What is wrong in saying, 'don't tell a lie!' and 'don't steal!' These are good words. But when society has stood on the foundation of grave lies and theft, all these morals are hypocritical. The class of masters does not observe these morals. It is not possible for the poor class to observe them, even if it wants to. Ultimately, no class observes them. Hence, they are impractical hypocrisy.

The class society, while based on 'injustice', wants individuals to be moral. This is why, all that it says are false morals, false principles and false theories!

If individuals have to be moralistic, the society itself has to be moralistic. It has to stand on the morality that every person ought to perform labour. That is, communist morality. It is a morality that contributes to equality! Thus, communist morality is opposed to that of exploitative societies in every aspect.

Primitive communism and a higher form of communism are not the same!

We have seen that the 'Gen system' is called 'primitive communism' since it was a society without classes. But we cannot compare the higher form of society called 'communism' with the Gen society of the remote past. Because, except classlessness, the two are not the same in all the other aspects.

Human beings did not have any knowledge about Nature at the time of the Gen system. The fact that the population of a given Gen lived like a band with collective rules indicates that it was the need of that time. That collectivity was inevitable at that time for the sake of protection from the wild animals and the attacks of the enemy tribes. That collectivity is similar to that found among crowds of birds and herds of animals. But collectivity of a communist society is not of that kind. Here it is concerned with the rights over means of labour and labour relations. Here people have their respective personal lives.

If the collectivity in the Gen society is for the sake of needs of Nature, the collectivity in the communist society is something people acquire as a matter of new human refinement.

Referring to the life in the Gen society, people say, "It was a period of pure mindedness and truthfulness. In that epoch, justice prevailed everywhere *as obviously as a cow walks on its four legs*. But the then meanings of the terms 'justice' and 'truth' were different. At that time, war against the neighbouring tribe and killing those people was also a matter of justice and truth. It was justice appropriate to that period.

But, in the communist society, wars and killings are not justified. Here there is no scope for antagonism. It is a fully developed human refinement. Hence, we cannot equate the communist society with such an ignorant society like primitive communism. We should not treat them equally.

If we observe the human society in a successive order, slave-owning society is more developed than the Gen society. The feudal society is more developed than the slave-owning society and the capitalist society is more developed than the feudal society. Above all, the communist society is a fundamental and revolutionary development. This means, evolution of history is proceeding toward progress.

But, due to the 'money mindedness' and 'money relationships', this capitalist society does not appear to be more progressive than the earlier societies. It appears that all the values of the past have vanished from human life. When viewed while standing in the midst of the capitalist society filled with commercial relations, the feudal society, which does not involve many commercial relations, appears to be the best of all societies. And the present (capitalist) world appears to be rotten.

True that the present day world is rotten. But, the earlier exploitative societies were more rotten than the present one. There were no better elements in them. Each had its own wickedness.

As the present day world is rotten, what we need is the future world! But not the past world.

The path of liberation from the wicked bourgeois world is — World of Equality. Communism that can eliminate exploitation. We do not want the past feudal world or Slave world.

When we are able to understand all these stages in history, we can understand in which stage and with what objective did religious texts like *Ramayana* emerged and who they serve. We can also grasp why the present capitalist society *holds it* (*Ramayana*) *on its head* with reverence. Because it is also an exploitative society. It needs people to keep their superstitious beliefs. That's why the capitalist class adores the religions and religious literature. It adores all the paths that prevent people from looking at Socialism.

Prophets and Social Reformers

In history, which we have seen so far, 'sorrow' began since the emergence of the 'exploitation of labour'. There have already been compassionate people who responded to this 'sorrow'. But they could not show the path of liberation from that sorrow.

The Jesus Christs and the Buddhas could not reduce even an iota of human sorrow. Because they were not aware of that path. Morals, which they preached, without knowing the actual reason, could not turn into actual solutions for the problems. Sermons like, "If some one slaps you on one cheek, turn the other cheek" and "don't be jealous of others' riches and wealth" could not show the path of liberation to the victims.

Even those prophets, who showed compassion for the poor, distressed and sorrowful, preached morals that were favourable to the rich class, made sufferers helpless, and strengthened the rich. That is why, the rich classes gradually gave a high place to these prophets in society, carved their sermons in golden letters and propagated them among people.

Social reformers occupy the place next to the prophets.

Reformism is like Soldering!

Social reformers are also deeply moved by the sufferings of human beings. They are eager to change certain things, which they think are unjust. But, in their view, some injustice takes place only in one corner of the society. Each reformer sees one corner! Some reformers think, 'It is enough if inter-caste marriage take place. Thereafter human beings won't have any hardships". Some argue, 'there won't be any problems if people stop worshipping god". For some the upliftment of women; it is enough if marriages take place without giving dowry! Or women won't have any problem if they make and sell savoury pancakes like *'appadaalu'* and *'odiyaalu'*. All problems like prostitution, poverty and beggary among women will vanish through the reform of pancakes.

Some intellectual reformers believe that without uttering a single word against capitalism they can reform wars, which are created by capitalism. Similarly, they think that worker's lives will improve if wages were little increased. Likewise whenever there is corruption in the government, they think the administration will be cleansed if ministers are changed. Superficial changes within the system!

Reformers never care to find out the root cause of a problem and give a permanent solution of a problem. They suggest solutions, which they habitually know. But, as there is not a right solution to the problem, society will not change even a little even if they influence some individuals.

Let us take the question of dowry. For whom does it pose a problem? This is a problem to those who offer it. Not to those who receive it. This means, there are two 'classes' in this small problem. There is 'contradiction' between the two. How will a reformer solve this problem? What is the basis for this problem? Why are women obliged to give money to men? When will marriages take place without reference to economic relations? Giving or taking dowry and related gifts is a problem that arose from the root cause called 'property'. This problem sieges even the propertyless class. Elimination of private property is the solution for this. Even if a reformer understands this problem correctly, he will have to try for a temporary solution because the permanent solution is not available immediately. The reformer lectures with good intention, "It is an insult for a woman to get married by giving a dowry. It is the meanness of a man to take a dowry". A couple of people will be influenced by that lecture. If ten young people get married without dowry inspired by the lecture, about seven or eight of them will soon repent for not having taken it. To them it appears foolishness not to take a dowry because of their financial difficulties, especially due to unemployment.

Some young men of this category who did not take dowry daily look at their wives as if saying, "Hum! It is only I who married you without taking a dowry. Look, how much sacrifice I made?" Thereafter that poor wife keeps saying, "True, sir! You are a great man. Every one among our relatives talks about you". She keeps saying these words politely bowing down every moment with gratitude and after some time she may even become a hunchback due to frequent bowing. She will tell twice a day, both morning and evening, to the maidservant or the aunt in the neighboring house, in a loud voice so that her husband hears her: "My husband did not take dowry, you see!" Thus she keeps that broad-minded man happy.

Should a solution solve the problem or create other problems and conflicts?

There are definitely be some young men who really hate the dowry system because of the influence on them of the reformers. But it is not a real solution to the problem. If taking or not taking dowry depends on the whims of the man, it can't be a solution. There must be a situation whereby a man cannot get dowry even if wanted to take it. That custom should not exist in society. That is the solution.

Dowry, slavery of women, poverty, prostitution, beggary, religious superstition, caste distinctions — all these are not different problems. All these sores are born out of the same disease. Their treatment (solution) will not be different from one another.

Think of any ailment. Take 'flu', for example. This fever is accompanied by many symptoms like cold, headache, toothache and body pains. The headache-reformer argues "it is enough if we treat the headache. The patient will get up and move about without any problem". The toothache-reformer's logic is: "First we have to treat the toothache. Everything will be alright if this is done". Some incline towards pains in the legs, some towards pains in the arms. Some towards a cold! A person who realises the need to treat the actual ailment is a knowledgeable doctor. A reformer, who gives temporary relief for an aspect of the ailment, cannot be such a doctor!

Reformers examine in isolation the problems that arose from the same reason in society. A reformer who wants the annihilation of the caste system ignores women's problems. A reformers who propagate atheism do not think of poverty. Reformer, who wants changes in society, does not side-glance at politics. Reformers do not at all understand that there is a coordination and inseparable connection among all these problems. This situation is as ridiculous as if some one were to say, "Why should I bother about the health of the entire body. It is enough if this particular finger becomes strong!"

It is so difficult to isolate even a small problem from the development of society and solve it just as it is impossible to make a finger stronger without reference to the whole body.

People who do not have a proper understanding of society think that they can do something good with their reformism. That is why, we can compare society and reformers with an elephant and the blind men who describe the elephant.

In the story, some blind persons who could not see the elephant as a whole, touch some of its limbs and think it to be the whole elephant. The blind person who touches the trunk of the elephant says, "Don't I know what an elephant is? It is smooth and long". The blind person who touches the ear of the elephant says, "An elephant is not thin and long. It is very wide *like a winnowing fan*". The fourth blind person who touches the tail of the elephant argues, "None of you in fact knows anything about the elephant. An elephant looks thin like a piece of broomstick". Thus, the reformers, who cannot see the total picture of society, are no greater enlightened than the blind person who cannot see the elephant as a whole. The solutions, which reformers suggest for the defects in the society are merely soldering the vessels, which have holes. In one sense, the vessel repairers are better. They suggest that the entire bottom of the vessel must be removed because they get money. Reformers do not exhibit even that much revolt. They say that a change of an inch or foot and half is enough".

Let us suppose that a writer described the sufferings of the poor at length, made readers shed tears and finally ended the story by saying that the poor worshipped god and were relieved of their hardships by the mercy of god. If the writer depicted this, as he was unaware of the exploitation of labour, he is innocent. However innocent he might be, whatever he has said in the story will serve to mislead the poor and help the rich.

Suppose a story reads like this: a factory-owner is a great humane person, he treated workers like his own children and finally he distributed his entire property to the workers. This story creates illusions among the workers toward the owners and misleads their ideas.

"King Dasaratha ruled people like his own children"

"Under Rama's rule, people were prosperous"

Stories such as these have been keeping people in the darkness for hundreds and thousands of years.

If a mad person either intentionally or unintentionally stabs another person with a knife, that knife would do its duty. Similarly, the pen in the hand of a poet also does the same thing. It may tell the truth as well as untruth. If it tells the truth, it does good to the sufferers. If it tells untruth, it does good for the oppressors.

Some writers depict that living in poverty is the best way in life. According to them, the poor people glow with purity of mind and modesty…The souls of the poor overflow with peace and joy. If we read those descriptions, we may aspire for poverty, "Oh! How fortunate the poor are! How lucky it is to beg and live in huts!"

When we watch poverty in films, we have an indescribable fascination for it.

How treacherous it is to describe intolerable poverty as a condition that gives happiness!

Reformers who propagate the importance of a clean environment in the slum wear ironed clothes and converse with the working class women as follows:

"Lass! You have to keep your children clean!"

Confused looks of the women labourers!

"These drainage canals, these pigs, this mud around the huts — what is this? Kids may catch many diseases from this dirt"

"Then, where should they play?"

The reformer cannot answer. He knows that children should not play in the dirt but does not know where they can play. He doesn't know that there is a need for houses with adequate ventilation, drainage system, and spacious surroundings. But he looks as if 'why do poor children play'. He stops answering them where to play, he tries to avoid the touch of the dirty children who crowd round him, goes away from them and says, "You have to give the children bath twice a day. You have to change their clothes".

Children as well mothers are bewildered.

Soap!…Bath!…Clothes! What do these mean?"

If a woman who knew the face of soap surprised, asks, "Where do we have soap with us?" Others may ask, "Well, where is there water?"

This time the reformer is puzzled.

How strange their words are! Don't they have soap! Don't they have water, at least?

Why would he become a reformer if he knew what people have and what they don't have? He would have become a 'revolutionary'!

Finally, he says, "Mothers! You must keep your children clean!" and, in that disappointed mood, he may write a great essay: "In the slums, more than filth, there is a lot of ignorance among the working class women. The government must immediately start night schools for them and educate them!" — This is what that gentleman discovered! Reformers do not rise above this level. Or, reformers are those who stop at this level!

Among these reformers and writers, all do not belong to the rich class. Most of them belong to the intellectual section within the working class. But, they know nothing about class distinctions. They do not know about their own lives. They believe, imbibe, respect and disseminate again and again the theories, which the rich class has been preaching for millennia, and thus serve the rich class, while doing harm to themselves!

Once Again on *Ramayana*

In this preface, we have discussed something about *Ramayana*, stopped it there and examined the process of evolution of human society. Because, only if we know the process, we will be able to understand as to what stage a literary text is related, to which class the values that the text propagates are favourable and to which class they are opposed. This is why, we have examined the process of history. Again we have to talk about Ramayana.

Myth and Reality

In the story *Ramayana,* there are not only human beings but also gods, *Rakshasas*, Vanaras, Yakshas, Gandharvas, Nagas, Kinneras and Kimpurushas and many other kinds of people.

Human beings are as usual. If it is *Rakshasas*, they have two heads, three heads, ten heads, bull faces, donkey faces, dog faces, fox faces. Thus, they are of various ugly faces. There are '*Kaama ruupaas*'. That is they can assume whatever form they want. (*Yet, they are always in ugly forms*!)

Vanaras have tails. (*Tails only for males. The poet has nowhere mentioned that females have tails. This is one of the good things that the poet has done!*)

The rest of them are gods. These people are extremely beautiful. They always fly, jump, sing and roam about. (*There are many people who believe all this. Not illiterate. Only pundits. Illiterate pundits!*)

Well, who are these Vanaras, *Rakshasas* and gods? Are there such beings as these? We do not need any research on this issue. All this is the creative skill of the poets! They used to narrate the stories of the past through these myths (Mythology). They created stories with things and hopes which are not possible in real life. These stories are full of gods, miracles, boons, curses and such other myths. Yet, within those stories, we find the essence of social life. What we want is not the form of their writing but their social essence.

We have to convert every thing in the story into reality. If we convert so, *Rakshasas*, Vanaras, gods, Yakshas, *Gikshas* - all are human beings. All have the same physical properties.

Jambavan is a bear. His daughter is Jambavati. Sri Krishna, a human being, married her. (This is not a story in *Ramayana*).

Anjana is a Vanara woman. Vayudeva, is a god (of wind). Hanuman was born to these two.

Similarly, Vali was born to Indra and Sugriva to the Sun. Ghatotkacha was born to Bhima and a *Rakshasa* woman called Hidimbi. Ilavan was born to Arjuna and a Naga woman called Uluchi.

(Hanuman - who was born to a Vanara woman and god-man - became a Vanara like his mother. Ghatotkacha - who was born to a *Rakshasa* woman and a human being - became a *Rakshasa* like his mother. Ilavan - who was born to a Naga woman and a human being - became a Naga like his mother. We can compare these stories to the fact that children in Gen society belonged to the mother's gen. These children stayed with their mothers instead of fathers.)

Surpanakha, a *Rakshasa* woman, asks Rama, a human being, to marry him. Ravana, a *Rakshasa*, asks Sita to marry him. In this manner, we can see hundreds of examples. From these examples, it is clear that there had been very natural physical relationships among all people: between humans and Vanaras; Vanaras and gods; gods and *Rakshasas*; *Rakshasas* and humans.

It is not possible for humans and monkeys, monkeys and birds, birds and snakes and snakes and humans to have physical relations and beget children, is it?

Some people naively vacillate, "Though it is not possible these days, perhaps it might have been possible in those days!" The distinction between 'these days' and 'those days' is relevant to the social matters but not to laws of nature.

Begetting children by a monkey and a human being does not happen during those days or these days or any day.

This means, *Rakshasas*, Vanaras, gods, Nagas, Yakshas, Gandharvas - are all human beings. We have to assume that all these people belonged to different races, tribes or territories. All the names of these tribes are akin to those of birds, animals and trees found in Nature.

There was hostility between Rama's race and Ravana's race.

There was no such evident hostility between Rama's race and other races.

The poet of *Ramayana* (Valmiki) belonged to Rama's group. He stood on the side of traditions and social values, which Rama defended.

The poet of *Ramayana* depicted the *Rakshasas* as ugly and downright wicked. He depicted the Vanaras as ugly and made fun of them on some occasions. It was Rama's dynasty alone which the poet treated uncritically and with great respect and reverence.

In these stories of *The Poisonous Tree*, all are human beings. This makes no difference for the story. Because, for example, human Hanuman plays the same role in 'the Poisonous Tree' which Hanuman with a tail plays in Valmiki's

Ramayana. Just as a ten-headed Ravana behaves, the human Ravana also behaves in the same way. In this '*Poisonous Tree*', I have not changed either the actual story or the behaviour and the nature of their characters. Therefore, nothing in this book is contrary to Valmiki.

What is scientific knowledge?

According to Valmiki's myth, Maricha is a *Rakshasa*. He can assume whatever form he wants. Due to Ravana's order, he became a beautiful deer!

Jatayu is a bird and Hanuman is a monkey. But they speak like normal people.

Lying down on moonlit nights, we tell these kinds of stories to the kids. They do not ask questions about the naturalness and unnaturalness of these stories. Children do not question, "How can a bird speak? How can a monkey speak? Why do all the birds that we see chirp but not talk?" The brain of the children is in its infancy. It does not have much capacity to think and argue. Children are gullible. Therefore, they listen happily to whatever we say, without disbelief. They believe whatever there is in the story.

If adults also believe these stories just as kids believe them, it means they too are childlike. But adults have commonsense which children do not have. They know that monkeys in the world which they observe daily do not speak. Yet when they hear these stories, they believe them, "Monkeys used to speak in the past!" This means, mere 'common sense' is not enough to understand any thing. To realise the fact that 'it is unnatural for monkeys to speak. It is, in fact, not possible in Nature", one should know about the body of both monkeys and human beings. One should know why humans can speak and animals and birds cannot speak. Thus, knowing the 'actual causes' concerning an issue is scientific knowledge. (This is, scientific knowledge concerning Nature).

However strongly we may believe something which is impossible, it will not happen.

On seeing a rope in the darkness, if we believe that it is a snake, that rope does not change into a snake. It has no connection with others' beliefs, imagination, myths and poetry. A rope remains a rope. To grasp the actual truth about the rope, it is enough if we have even a little light. But, it is not possible to understand every thing so easily. It is not easy to understand that 'the earth is not flat, it is round.' Because, the earth appears to us to be flat. This is commonsense. It means, common sense is not enough to grasp the actual essence of a thing. To understand that 'the earth is a huge ball and it revolves with great velocity in a space", we should possess some power of imagination. We should know many more things.

If some body says, 'The earth is round. I am saying this. Believe it", it is not possible to believe it. People must have their independent thought. They should know the connection between the

Sun and the earth. We should confirm the roundness of the earth and its revolution, in the light of the fact of the formation of day and night. Until then, it is not possible to understand the fact that earth is round. Likewise, common sense is not enough to understand any thing in nature. We need scientific knowledge.

An egg turns into a chicken but a stone does not turn into a chicken, why? The conditions favourable for the emergence of a chicken are inside the egg. And not in the stone. Therefore, a stone does not turn into a chicken. Not only into a chicken, it does not turn into any other substance contrary to its properties. It is impossible for some gods, sages or magicians to change a stone into a flower, bird or a lump of sweet by means of their great miracles or power of penance. In fact, acquiring miracles and penance power by gods and sages - to do things contrary to nature - is unnatural. It means, in the first place, gods themselves are unnatural. Believing in those gods, sages do penance. If they can acquire any skills; it must be those skills, which are possible in nature. Others do not have those skills. But, no sage can do things that are contrary to nature.

Human beings have created a mythology with many unnatural things for the past several thousand years. They have adored those mythologies.

See what **Marx** - who taught the materialist conception of human history - says regarding this aspect.

"All mythology subdues, controls and fashions the forces of nature in the imagination and through imagination; it disappears therefore when real control over these forces is established." -- (Marx, 1859. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970. p. 216.)

After reading these mythologies, if we say, "Ah, yeah! Ignorant people wrote that way!", it means that we are not able to grasp the basis for the mythologies in the past society. In a given story, the hero turns into a bird and travels in the sky or sits comfortably on the back of a bird and wanders about. This is a matter of joy to human beings of those times. The joy that they were able to do that which they could not do in fact. Our Vishnu roams about on the back of birds. For mythologies, there is no distinction between countries. At all places, human beings composed stories as if they had conquered nature. Our Rama, whenever he gets angry, says, "I will shoot down the sun and the moon!" (Of course, he never felled them even once!)

Do you know what a hero in the ancient Chinese mythology did? There used to be ten Suns in the sky. Due to their heat, the entire greenery on the earth used to get exhausted. So, the king became angry. He called a great archer named Yee and told him, "Shoot down the Suns." Then Yee shot down nine Suns and allowed one Sun to continue thinking, "Otherwise, the world will be plunged into darkness." Had that Chinese hero not felled down those Suns, the worlds would have been turned into ashes by now.

Our Hanuman can grow as big as a mountain and as small as a cat. But Sun-Wu-Kung, the Chinese Vanara could assume 72 forms in all: as a human being, tree, hill, snake, bird and flower. Since there was no hero who could assume 73 forms, none could conquer this Vanara.

Our Jatayu, Sampati and Hanuman wanted to have fun going near the Sun. But fell down without getting close. Whereas another Chinese hero called Kuvawu bet with the Sun, "Who will walk quickly - you or me?" Finally, he defeated the Sun and the Sun lagged behind. How wonderful these Chinese heroes are!

Today, human beings can travel in many ways: on the road, in waters and in the sky. Now, we are not in awe as we were in the past in Naga girls who went to deep in the rivers and reached the nether world or gods with wings who flew in the sky and reached heaven. (Those stories are always fascinating, of course. Nothing more than that!) Today, we do not dream of sitting on a miraculous mat. We would like to board an airplane. We would like to go to the moon in a rocket. This means, our thoughts have left myths (miraculous mats and miraculous horses) behind and are arriving at the possible and real. We have scientific outlook. But, it is limited to a very few areas.

When there are no rains, the rivers have dried up and the life becomes miserable, human beings who do not have scientific knowledge, get rains in their imagination and are satisfied. The same imagination assumes the form of stories. In such a story, the sage has all powers. All people pray to him to get rain. Then the sage turns his hand left and right with a great mercy and smile. Thereafter see *how streams and villages become one and the same due to the rains.* Next moment, all the trees bend with the weight of the fruit bunches. All the flower gardens blossom so much that the ground is entirely covered with flowers.

"Enough! Stop", all people make a hullabaloo that they do not want rain. They pray to the sage again. He again, with the same nice smile, raises his hand and orders the rain, "Stop!"

The Ganges follows Bhagiratha along with his chariot meandering. — This is unnatural. But at a time when primitive people used to gather round water wherever it was present and fight fiercely for the shore lands, taking rivers to the areas of their choice is a splendid fancy. It is a story imagined with a passionate desire to take the waters through out the earth wherever they are needed.

It was the belief of society of those days that if water was offered in obsequies to the dead they would reach heaven. When we acquire scientific knowledge that enables us to divert rivers to any part of the earth, there isn't any need for such fictitious stories as dragging water along with the chariot by meditation and arresting water in locks of hair and gulping down entire river waters.

Elements of Nature like water, air, earth and fire take some or other form and behave like human beings, birds and animals; a newly born infant grows up the next moment, fights with enemies and conquers them; the stars, the sun and the moon come under the control of man and carry out his orders obediently; thousands of children come into existence out of a huge globe; reducing to ashes the enemies by uttering a single menacing sound; the sea of milk, the sea of yoghourt, the sea of ghee, the sea of *Paayasam,* a sweet made of milk, rice and sugar, the sea of seasoned butter milk soup; emergence of nectar, poison, beautiful damsels, invaluable treasures from those seas when they are churned; the "Wishing Tree" *Kalpataru*, and benevolent mythological cow '*Kamadhenu*' bestow instantly whatever is desired; copulating for hundreds of years; creating heavens with the power of meditation; man reaching heaven by flying; defeating the enemies with the aid of gods. — The reason for such fictitious stories is to fulfil those wishes in imagination since they do not materialse. All those stories are wishes.

If human beings acquire scientific knowledge and understand what is possible and what is impossible and if they progress and make use of the forces of nature to fulfil their needs, there won't be any scope for any kind of unnatural belief and myth.

Even today, for the people who have to walk several miles to fetch a pot full of water, how can a story of a sage getting rain not cause joy? There is no sense in calling such people, "Fools who lack scientific knowledge". It is not enough if scientific knowledge exists in books. Scientific knowledge will become a part of the lives of the people when it satisfies their daily needs.

The fact that we still read stories like the *Ramayana* implies that the 'wonders', which many characters in those stories perform at every point, are attracting us! This means it is necessary for our lives to harbour hopes on gods and wonders! Grasping the social conditions is also a science.

Here let us consider the question of education. It is already thousands of years since writing and reading started in human society. Many skills and sciences developed in time. Yet, there are human beings *who have not seen the face of education*! (Seventy percent of the people in India illiterate!)

Appanna of the Madiga caste does not have education. His father did not have it, or his grand father or his great grand father before him. Tomorrow his children will not have it and his grand children too will not have it.

All people in the family of Mr. Rama Sastry are pundits! His father was a collector. His grand father was a Vedic scholar. His great grand father was a priest of a king. Now, Rama Sastry's son is studying medicine. His daughter went to America very recently. The eldest grand son is studying in an English missionary school.

We see these facts daily in our society.

The blind beggar woman, lays her infant child near a garbage bin, makes noise with a vessel and begs shouting. Hundreds of cars heedlessly pass in front of her towards cloth shops, hotels, film theatres, clubs, parties and temples. Not all these are unfamiliar. All this is common. But, because it is common it does not explain the secret behind such scenes and the basis for these distinctions. We need 'scientific knowledge'.

Whenever we talk of 'scientific

knowledge', we have to remember two things.

(1) Scientific knowledge concerning Nature.

(2) Scientific knowledge concerning Society.

There are many forces in 'nature'. There is all kinds of wealth. But, all that wealth is owned by a class which plays no role in its creation. It is 'alien' to its real creators.

It is a waste however much knowledge concerning Nature is discovered. Only when we discover the exploitation of labour and stop it, scientific knowledge will be accessible to the entire society.

Before we enter the story of *Ramayana*, we have to know an important point. It is about 'Interpolations' or 'Interpolated texts'.

Hullabaloo about Interpolations

'Interpolation' means something added. Added to what? To Valmiki's original. While examining *Ramayana*, we have to know that there is a question of interpolation.

Some researchers of *Ramayana* argue, the '*Ramayana* which is in currency under the name of Valmiki was not entirely written by Valmiki.' Valmiki wrote only 10 thousand slokas. Poets of the later times extended it up to 24 thousand slokas." Some researchers also point out which parts of the present day text of *Ramayana* are interpolations.

The one Valmiki *Ramayana* available at present in Sanskrit consists of 7 kandas (parts).

1) Bala kanda
2) Ayodhya kanda
3) Aranya kanda
4) Kishkindha kanda
5) Sundara kanda
6) Yuddha kanda
7) Uttara kanda

Pundits say that there are 24 thousand slokas as a whole in these 7 kandas. (Anybody can find this out if they count the slokas. I have not counted them.)

All the researchers who are devotees believe that 'the story of *Ramayana* really happened. It is history.' They also believe all the miracles in the story.

In which period this story was written in the form of a book (writing on leaves like palm leaves)? There is no consensus among the researchers on this question. But all people agree that this story had been popular among people much before it was written by anyone. (Popular in the sense that people used to tell this story in the form of short stories and songs.)

Almost all people are of the view that it was Valmiki who first composed the story of *Ramayana*. When we say that he first composed it, it does not mean that he just transferred the stories, which people used to tell or sing as they were then in vogue. He 'wrote' the entire story in the form of two line-slokas following a metre and grammar, using his poetic abilities.

There are varied opinions about the period in which it was 'written'. Some top foolish pundits calculate it as follows: 'Sri Mahavishnu assumed the incarnation of Rama in Tretaa yuga, didn't he? Valmiki wrote Rama's story when Rama was still ruling his kingdom, didn't he? If we calculate in this way, it is about 9 lakh years ago since the *Ramayana* was written.'

Brahma loka (Brahma's world), Vishnu loka, Go-loka, *Gi-loka* - these are mere fancies of the devotees. These are the worlds not found in Nature. Similarly, in calculating the period, the use of terms Krita yuga, (Krita epoch), Treeta yuga, Dwaapara yuga are also unrealistic concepts. All these are terms of Puranic (mythological) language as found in religious texts. Therefore, this nine-lakh year argument is *useful only for laughing*.

Some researchers, of *Ramayana* and *Bhaarata*, who have worked hard observed, 'It might be two thousand five hundred years since the *Ramayana* was written'. Some others estimated it to be 'one thousand years ago'. There are also people who indicate that the period lies between these two periods. Even if we go by this estimate, it is a matter of some hundreds or thousands of years.

Critics argue that many poets have been expanding the *Ramayana* by adding newer and newer scenes of their choice (in Sanskrit) for hundreds and thousands of years. Such newly added scenes are called '*Prakshiptas*'. (Prakshipta = Added).

Regarding how these interpolations were made, one has to decide according to their imagination. Let us suppose that there is Valmiki's *Ramayana* (a book written on palm leaves). He reads it daily, doesn't he? He may feel like expanding a scene or adding a new sloka. Either that poet singly or some such poets together make such additions. That new part of palm leaves goes into the old text. After some period of time, either this text or its copy will be accessible to another poet. If that poet is also enthusiastic about adding some thing, some more palm leaves will be added to it. (This is merely a speculation. This does not mean that it happened exactly like this.)

In India, it is said, there are three or four versions of *Ramayana* ascribed to Valmiki. All those versions have just about a thousand slokas in common and the rest of the slokas have no connection with one version to the other. Valmiki's *Ramayana*, which we are going to study now, is one such version.

If it is true that the story, which Valmiki wrote originally, was short in length and it has turned into a very long story subsequently after hundreds or thousands of years, it is a very natural development. Because, it was a period when palm leaves were used for writing, it is possible to insert new palm leaves here and there. If it had been a period when things were printed on paper, bounded and secured in the libraries, it would not have been possible to insert new pages into a book. If somebody had wanted to deceive specifically, he would have to reprint the entire book. But it is not possible to add new pages to the already printed book. There have not been any problem in doing so during the period of palm leaf bundles.

But, what the poets of the interpolated text did was not deception. They did so out of their reverence for the story of *Ramayana*. They added certain things to those scenes which they liked only in order to demonstrate their reverence.

Ramayana, which has been familiar to people for several hundreds of years is the one that included the interpolations. All of them became parts of that story. There are no recent interpolations in it.

There is an argument that not only in *Ramayana* but also in Bhaarata and *Bhaagavatha*, there are interpolations. Interpolations were a natural process depending on the social conditions. We have to accept them so. Those who resorted to interpolations felt that it was not wrong to interpolate. But some of Valmiki's devotees do not receive these interpolations as natural.

These devotees are of two types. The first kind do not agree if we say that there are interpolations. These people argue that it was Valmiki alone who wrote almost the whole of *Ramayana*. The second type say that many parts in *Ramayana* are interpolations. They say what Valmiki wrote originally was very short. But that became incongruous and incoherent in the midst of Interpolations. They argue that all the interpolations destroyed the respectability of the poetry of Valmiki. They have an indescribable aversion for the interpolation.

The first type of Valmiki devotees do not entertain any doubt in *Ramayana*. They do not examine any thing critically. To every absurd thing, they give great spiritual interpretations. They say some wonderful secret is implied even in those parts which are apparently absurd. They even declare that it is not at all possible to understand it.

The second type accept that there are some incongruous and incoherent things in the *Ramayana*. But they argue that the sole reason for such incongruous things are the interpolations and thus they throw all the blunders on to the interpolations. They say, 'originally Valmiki wrote great, melodious, beautiful and natural poetry but the later poets made it haphazard and blunderous. Valmiki is not responsible for any of the shortcomings.' At every step, they defend Valmiki and brandish their swords against the interpolations. Even in imagination, they do not allow the thought that 'Valmiki might have committed any mistake!' They do not give space to the thought that 'there may be reasons other than interpolations for the shortcomings in *Ramayana*.'

These two types of people are Valmiki's devotees. The first type are stupid devotees while the second type are shrewd devotees. Let us leave the first type of devotees aside. They do not seem to yield to logic. We have to examine a little bit of the views of the second type of devotees.

According to some of them, the entire *Bala kanda* is an interpolation. The entire *Uttara kanda* is also an interpolation. Further, many scenes in the remaining five kandas also are interpolations. After discarding all these interpolations, the real *Ramayana* remains. In this, there are no mistakes or incongruous things. - This is their claim.

But it is totally wrong to assume that all the shortcomings in *Ramayana* are due to interpolation; otherwise the story would have been wonderful. This assumption indicates a lack of understanding of the history of poetry and social reality.

The method of writing in *Ramayana* followed the mythological form. The story proceeded along the lines of values of primitive, slave-owning and feudal societies. It is not possible for any poet to write this story without absurdities and contradictions.

Let us suppose that certain parts have really been added to Valmiki's story in the form of interpolations. As all the poets of the interpolations also must have some name, let us call all of them '*Gilmiki*'

Inconsistencies are inevitable in stories based on mythology and false values, not only in those parts which Gilmiki wrote but also in those parts which Valmiki wrote.

The poets of interpolations did not change the nature of the story anywhere. They utilized their poetic talent to preach more emphatically the morals and values, which Valmiki has articulated. None of the poets of the interpolations departs from Valmiki's version either in the case of Rama's devotion to his father or in the case of Sita's devotion to her husband.

How does it matter even if thousands of slokas are added when the essential nature of the story does not change? We need not go to the poets to understand this point. Even those who narrate *Harikathas*, the divine stories of gods, they add their own myths while telling the story of any god. Film people create Ramas and Krishnas in newer forms. Whoever makes whatever changes or add any number of new things, those additions and alterations will be in accordance with the essential nature of the story.

Let us consider some myths. The point that 'Dasaratha lived for 60 thousand years' is unnatural. But, it was a way of telling stories of those days. They expressed that desire to live longer in that manner. Valmiki also knew that human beings do not live for thousands of years. Yet he wrote like this because the practice of telling stories in mythical form existed much before Valmiki. He followed the same practice. There was no place for naturalness and logic in stories of those days. The society was not concerned with them.

Will any contemporary writer today write that 'Dasaratha Ramayya is two thousand years old'? Will he write that 'Hanumanta Rao flew from Kanyakumari to Colombo with his power'? However much a writer may believe in miracles, he has to conceal the belief as he cannot write so. Why cann't he write so? The present day society has acquired so much scientific knowledge in certain matters that such things cannot be written even in stories.

In a society which lacks scientific knowledge, myths and miracles dominate the arts. Kings live for 60 thousand years. Sages do penance for 10 thousand years. Not only in such myths; even in the contexts in which characters express their hardships or happiness, we don't find reason or logic. It is the same case even if Valmiki wrote it.

But the critics of interpolations do not understand these things. If they find anything incongruous, inconsistent or absurd, they immediately say, 'If it were Valmiki, he would not have written like that. This is the mistake of the poets of the interpolations.' They do not put a question to themselves, 'When Valmiki did not write such an absurd thing why did another write it?'

If they find a mistake, they say, 'This is an interpolation.' They think it is the only correct and intelligent answer. With their superstitious devotion that they can defend Valmiki, they attribute every thing to interpolations.

If we assume 'this is an interpolation' at every place, it is not a correct answer. We will search for an answer only if we raise the question, 'why did the poet of interpolation write like this?' only then we will find the reason.

It is irrelevant for us whether Valmiki wrote it or Gilmiki wrote it. What did the two write? What is the content? This is what we want. We have to see things from this perspective.

If there are other things (yes, there are!) about interpolations, which we have to discuss, we will talk about them at the end, after we read the entire story.

Some Related Points

(1) Some literary researchers consider the story of *Ramayana* as a war between Aryans and Dravidians. It may be true. But, the terms 'Aryans' and 'Dravidians' are not found in this story. Gods and Rakshasas; Brahmins and Sudras — only these words are found. Gods, Brahmins and Rama constitute one section. The opposite side — Rakshasas. Ravana is its leader. According to the researchers of 'Aryans vs. Dravidians', we may infer and equate Rama's group with Aryans and Ravana's group with Dravidians.

Among these researchers some have joined the side of the Aryan king while the others have joined the side of the Dravidian king. It might be that Rama was an Aryan king and Ravana, a Dravidian king. So what? Owing to the distinction between the races, were there differences either in the rule of those kings or in those societies? There were no differences. (We will come to know about this when we enter the story.)

(2) Some researchers observed that *Ramayana* is popular not only in India but also in other countries in Asia like China, Tibet, Malaya, Cambodia, Java and Thailand with different titles and stories. They argue, "This story does not belong to India alone. Then, why do we discuss it?"

Ramayana might be in other countries as well. It is also present in this country, isn't it? It has been popular in this country since a long time.

Let us suppose that it is really proved that a poet of this country did not write this story but it originated in some other country and came to this country. It makes no difference. Whatever be its birthplace, it has had its impact on this society also since it is also present here.

What we ought to learn from literature or a theory is not that whether it is ours or not; whether it was born here or not. There are human beings in all the countries in the world. There are good things and bad things every where. We have to learn 'good' things from others. We should reject bad things even if they are ours. Instead of examining whether something is good or bad, if we look at in terms of 'ours or not', then it amounts to national chauvinism.

(3) There are many versions in the name of *Ramayana*: Valmiki *Ramayana*, Tulasi *Ramayana*, Kamba *Ramayana*, Bhaskara *Ramayana*, Molla *Ramayana* etc. But, all other *Ramayana*s follow Valmiki *Ramayana*. The essence of all versions is the same.

I have taken only the Valmiki *Ramayana* as the basis for this '*Poisonous tree*'. My questions, my criticism, everything is on Valmiki's story. I have not touched upon the stories and the incidents mentioned in other versions of *Ramayana*.

How the thought of writing 'The Poisonous Tree' began?

One night, over the radio, a divine-story teller (Haridas) was depicting with great enthusiasm and joy the 'valorous scene' which Lord Lakshmana, under the instructions of Lord Rama, cuts nose and ears of Surpanakha. **Kutumbarao** and **Gandhi**, who heard it one piece here and another there amidst their conversation, got angry with that description and wrote a story titled 'Surpanakha' after some days. (The two were new writers who used to write stories occasionally.)

Later, they gave that story for my comments. As I liked some of the points in that story very much. Rama's hypocrisy and Lakshaman's slavish mentality and cruelty made me think more about those characters.

Yet that story was based on what the divine-story teller said and not based on the incidents described by the original poet (Valmiki). I wanted to see how the original story reads. Immediately, I secured 'Valmiki *Ramayana*: (translated from Sanskrit by Mr. Gattupalli Seshacharyulu) and looked for the scene relating to Surpanakha. But, I felt it was not enough in order to understand the characters. I read the entire *Ramayana* beginning from *Balakanda* till the end.

I had singular surprises right from the first page to the last page! Singular doubts!

Many years before that I had made many critical comments on the character of Rama in my novel "Sweet Home". Until then I knew only some incidents of the *Ramayana*. I had never read it as I read it now.

I knew that the story *Ramayana* is an ancient religious literature but I was not aware that it had been in circulation with so many hazardously haphazard contents.

By the time I finished, I wondered, "Is this a book which people innocently believe in?"

When Rama did not at all have the right to the throne, why was he prepared for the coronation as if he were not aware of the actual fact? While he was expected to lead the life of a sage in the forest, why should he roam with weapons and wage wars? While the throne belonged to Bharata, why should Rama agree to put his shoes (sandals) on the throne? What greater relation is there between Rama and Lakshmana's brotherhood than that of 'master and servant'? What was the justice that Rama observed in his killing Tataki when he was young and 'Vali' when he became an adult? Why should Rama at all go to Janasthan, which belonged to Ravana? What great truth is there in this war except to occupy other territories?

What difference, in fact, is there between Rama and Ravana? Both are kings! Both are rich: and representatives of the rich. Both are anti-people! Poverty, beggary, prostitution, slavery of women — everything is present in both of their kingdoms.

Readers should know all these facts, shouldn't they? How do they know them if we don't tell them?

I read two translations of Valmiki *Ramayana* by two scholars:

1. Mr. Gattupalli Seshacharyulu.
2. Mr. Chadaluvada Sundara Rama Sastrulu.

These translations have original Sanskrit slokas in Telugu script. One translation has word for word meanings in addition to the summary of each sloka.

During this period, I was reading books on Marxism and trying to understand it. Exploitation of labour, classes, class struggles, slave society, feudal society, capitalist society, rule of the kings, people's revolts - All these concepts were giving me new kind of knowledge. With this understanding which I got from Marxism, I came to the conclusion that any king of any race is the same.

After this understanding convinced me, I felt like telling readers about the *Ramayana.* I wanted to write more about it.

Immediately, I started writing the story, "This is *Ramayana*!" In this story, young Rama kills Tataki.

Next, I changed the story 'Surpanakha', which Kutumbarao and Gandhi had written, to some extent, rewrote it and gave it the title, "This is how it happened!"

Next, I started writing, "A Throne at the mercy of the sandals". But, before I completed this story, I sent the first two stories to *Andhra Jyothy*, a weekly magazine. I sent the story "This is *Ramayana*!" in my name and the story "This is how it happened!" carried three names: names of the original writers of 'Surpanakha' and mine.

These two stories were published serially for few weeks in that magazine in early 1974.

After writing the story, 'Throne at the mercy of the Sandals', I did not send it to the magazine. (Due to some reasons, I thought that the magazine people would not publish it.) As three stories were ready by then, I wanted to bring out them as part one. I wrote a rather lengthy 'Preface' to it.

Any religious text, if we view it from the perspective of the interests of the people, is a "*Poisonous Tree*" for people. It is the same case with *Ramayana* also. It doesn't do any good for people except keeping them in slavery. Among the people it has no good to offer to women. Hence, I named it *"Ramayana, the poisonous tree"*.

Thus the first part of 'Ramayana, the Poisonous Tree' came out in 1974. Subsequently, the second part came in 1975 and the third part in 1976.

I wrote some incidents in the form of stories and some incidents in the form of 'Links' between one story and another. Wherever I thought it was necessary I have given footnotes and showed evidence from the original. Thus, it took three years for writing '*The Poisonous Tree*'.

This 'poisonous tree' could not have been written if I had had no knowledge of Marxism.

This preface has become very lengthy. But it was inevitable.

Now, we can go into the stories of *Ramayana*. The actual story begins with 'Balakanda'. ★

[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

PART 2

'The Poisonous Tree' Begins

Valmiki's *Ramayana*: A Prelude

Beginning of 'Bala Kanda'

The great sage Valmiki asked the great sage Narada, "Who is the man that has a good character, valour, virtues and commitment to truth in this world? Who is the man who is rich in traditions, who loves all living beings, who is a scholar, who is capable and who appears to be lovable to all? Who is the man who has knowledge of his own soul, who conquered anger, full of aura and without jealousy? Who is that man who creates fear even among gods when he gets angry? Is there any man with these qualities?"

[At the very beginning, readers will have a doubt. 'Valmiki asked Narada as follows' - Who says this? Who is the poet of this story? Is it not Valmiki? Is another poet telling the story? -- This is the doubt. But it is none but Valmiki who is writing this story. Not another poet. While telling the story, this poet does not say, "I have asked great sage Narada as follows". He says, "The great sage Valmiki asked the great sage Narada as follows." We have to assume that this was the then existing method of writing. Here we should not assume that it was not Valmiki but another poet was telling this story.

"The entire 'Bala kanda' is an Interpolation" - This is the opinion of some pundits. But if we go by the method of writing (of *Ramayana*), we can say that the story has begun appropriately with the contents of 'Bala kanda'.]

Narada, who knows all the worlds, said to Valmiki in response to his question: "Great sage Valmiki! The qualities that you have mentioned are very difficult to find. No man may have them. But there is a man who possesses such good qualities. There is a man named Rama in the Ikshavaku dynasty. He has conquered the senses.[1]

He is a great warrior, rich in customs, handsome, wise, knows morals and rules very well, converses well, causes fear in his enemies. He has a handsome physique with bones covered with flesh, has large eyes and wealthy. He is the protector of the suffering people. He does good to people. He is full of wisdom, protector of his own kith and kin, defender of Law, master of archery, knows all scriptures, is high minded and never loses courage. He is capable of assessing others' strength and ability. He is the

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1. Whenever we read some thing, we have to read it with a critical mind. We should not read them without applying our mind. For example: How can a man get angry once he has conquered anger? He creates fear even among gods when he gets angry, the poet says! This means, his getting angry is true and his conquering it is not true! Similarly, the question, 'is there any man who has no jealousy?' implies that it is impossible not to have jealousy! When a person gets angry after being described as someone who has conquered anger, can't a person become jealous of others even after being described as some one who has no jealousy?

Valmiki has described many good qualities and asked, 'Is there any such a person?' Even if Narada had answered, 'yes', all those good qualities in one may turn out to be false — just as conquering anger turned to be false.

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supporter of good men just as the ocean supports all rivers. He is as serene as the ocean, as firm as the Himalayan Mountain, as valorous as Vishnu and as pleasing as the moon. In anger, he is like a destructive fire at the end of creation. He is equal to Mother Earth in patience. He is generous like Kubera, the god of riches and wealth, in charity. He is god of justice in his lawful rule — This sort of a person is Lord Rama, the eldest son of Dasaratha!

Dasaratha made attempts to crown the eldest son. But as Dasaratha's wife Kaikeyi had been granted boons in the past, she demanded Rama's exile to the forest and Bharata's coronation as her boons. Dasaratha, who was committed to the truth, sent his dear son Rama to the forest since he had given boons to his wife in the past. Although Rama was valorous, he went in to the forests in the attire of a sage in order to carry out his father's command. Lakshmana also went along with him. Lakshmana is the son of Sumitra. Sita is Rama's wife. She is the daughter of King Janaka. Sita is a very noble woman. Sita too went into the forest along with her husband. The citizens and Dasaratha followed them for quite some distance and saw them off. Rama reached Sringaberapura on the bank of the Ganga and sent the chariot back. Guha was the king of that city. He was a king of hunter caste. He and Dasaratha were friends. He helped Rama cross the river Ganga. Then they crossed forests, visited the hermitage of the sage Bharadwaja, built a hut near the Chitrakuta Mountain and lived there comfortably.

Dasaratha died after Rama left. Although priests and friends tried to crown Bharata king, he did not agree to become the monarch. He went to Chitrakuta and requested Rama to accept the crown. Rama did not agree. But he gave him his sandals. Bharata began to rule the kingdom 'on behalf of those sandals'.

Rama left for Dandakaranya as he thought people would keep visiting him if he lived at Chitrakuta. In that great jungle, Rama killed a Rakshasa named Viradha. He visited sages Sarabhanaga, Suthishna and Agastya. He received weapons, which Agastya gave him. All the sages approached Rama and requested Rama to kill the Rakshasas. Rama promised them to do so.

While Rama was living there, Surpanakha came to him. Lakshmana cut off her nose and ears and sent her away. Then Khara came with a large army and attacked Rama. Rama killed all of them and eliminated all the Rakshasas (not spared even trace of a Rakshasa) in Janasthan.

Ravana, who was in Lanka, heard of all this, got angry, accompanied by Maricha, abducted Sita by a trick.

Rama heard of the entire incident through Jatayu, a vulture, grieved for Sita and started searching for her. On his way, he killed a Rakshasa called Kabandha. He met Sabari, a hermitess and she worshipped him.

He met a monkey named Hanuman on the bank of the Lake Pampa, through him he made friends with Sugriva, killed Sugriva's brother Vali and made Sugriva the king of the monkeys. Then Sugriva sent the monkeys in all directions to search for Sita.

Hanuman went to Lanka, met Sita and while returning home set fire to the city of Lanka.

Then Rama started for Lanka along with the army of monkeys, built a bridge across the ocean, reached Lanka and killed Ravana.

Rama suspected the chastity of Sita and refused to accept her. He accepted her after she proved herself to be pure by coming unscathed through fire.

Then Rama made Ravana's younger brother Vibhushana the king of Lanka, returned to Ayodhya in the aerial car called 'Pushpaka', shed the clothes of a sage and became king.

(Narada narrated these incidents that have happened so far in the past tense. In his subsequent narration, he used the present tense verbs as well as future tense verbs.

This means, we have to understand that Rama was ruling the kingdom in Ayodhya while Narada was narrating Rama's story to Valmiki.

"Is there any man who possesses such great virtues?" — Valmiki put this question to Narada while Rama was ruling the kingdom.

In response to Valmiki, Narada narrated all that had already happened and also the future, "Oh! Why not? There is a man called Rama who is rich in virtues in Ayodhya. He has faced many hardships, completed his exile in forests for fourteen years, killed Ravana recently, returned to Ayodhya and is ruling the kingdom well. He will continue to rule for eleven thousand years more."

Well, then, Valmiki was living in Rama's kingdom only, wasn't he?

Didn't great sage Valmiki know the fact that there was a great man called Rama until Narada told him? King Dasaratha, his sons, Rama's exile into forests for fourteen years, the killing of Ravana, his return to Ayodhya — Didn't Valmiki know all this? He had not heard the name of Rama so far!

The story of *Ramayana* starts strangely thus!

In the subsequent narration of Narada, contents of the 'Uttara kanda' do not figure. We don't find things like leaving Sita in the forest, the birth of Kusa and Lava etc.)

Narada says further, "The country will be prosperous under Rama's rule. All people will be happy".

Rama performs hundreds of horse sacrifices, donates millions of cows and gives untold riches. He will establish hundreds of royal dynasties. He will direct the people belonging to the four castes to follow their respective duties. Thus Rama will rule for eleven thousand years and then go to the Brahma loka, the highest heaven. This story of Rama is most sacred. It is equal to the Vedas. Those who read it will enjoy all comforts and also go to heaven.

Narada's narration is not yet over. He further talks about the fruits one will get by reading *Ramayana*. "If a Brahmin reads this *Ramayana*, he will become a great scholar. If a Kshatriya reads it he will rule the entire earth. If a Vysya reads, he will get profit in trade. If a Sudra reads it, he will become superior among Sudras". Thus narrating the story of Rama, Narada went to heaven.

Later, Valmiki, accompanied by a disciple named Bharadwaja, went to the river Tamasa, bathed in it, wrapped himself in his garments and saw a pair of cranes. The birds were fluttering about happily and making a charming noise. Meanwhile a hunter shot an arrow. It hit the male bird which fell down and died. The female bird cried pitifully. As soon as he noticed it, the sage Valmiki angrily said, "Oh, hunter! You won't live long! You have killed one of the pair of the cranes, devoted to each other passionately.".

Saying so, Valmiki wondered at his own words and said to his disciple, "Did you hear what I said? It is rhythmic like a song. It is suitable to be sung to the lute. It is poetry that came out of my grief".

Valmiki went back to his hermitage.

Brahma, the four faced god and the creator of all worlds, came there. Valmiki felt very happy, invited him and worshipped him.

Brahma said to Valmiki, "Oh, Great sage! The poem came out of your mouth due to my will. Compose the story of Rama with this ability. Narada has narrated to you the entire story of Rama. Owing to my kindness you will learn all the secrets which you do not know relating to the story of Rama. Nothing that you write will be false. The story of Rama that you write will remain as long as the mountains and rivers exist on earth. As long as *Ramayana* is popular you will be able to go about in my worlds". Saying so, Brahma disappeared.

Valmiki and his disciples felt very happy. All of them recalled the poem, which Valmiki had recited a while back.

I will write the story of Rama with such poems", said Valmiki. At once he wrote the story of Rama in hundreds of poems.

Listen, all of you, the story of Rama and the killing of Ravana!

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Valmiki, in order to learn the details of the 'story of Rama', turned towards the east, sat on the sacred grass and looked into his 'inner sight'.

[A question arises, when it is mentioned in the previous sarga that the poet had already composed the poet, why does he recall things before composing the poet? But this is a matter connected with the technique of writing. Almost all sermons in *Ramayana* appear like this.

The poet tells some thing briefly at the beginning and tells the same thing in detail later. We should not understand this as something wrong or a mistake.]

Then he understood all things connected with Rama's story. He grasped everything through his yogic powers and wrote Rama's story. He wrote about Rama's birth, his strength and valour, the worlds' love for Rama, strange incidents which had happened during his journey with Viswamitra…(Thus, there is a mention of all the important scenes in *Ramayana*. Here there is a reference to 'Uttara kanda'. Thus the sage Valmiki has depicted the entire Rama's story in seven parts.

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The sage Valmiki wrote the entire *Ramayana* while Rama was ruling the kingdom. There are 24,000 slokas (poems) in it. The sargas (Cantos or Chapters) are 500. The number of kandas (Books or Parts) are 7 including 'Uttara kanda'.

After composing the whole thing, Valmiki began to ponder, "Who will carry this to the public". Kusa and Lava, attired as ascetics, came and touched Valmiki's feet. They were living in the hermitage of Valmiki.

Both of them were brothers and the sons of Rama.

Valmiki taught them to sing the story of Rama. Kusa and Lava used to sing the story in the gatherings of sages, Brahmins and other places where good people assembled. Sages and ordinary people used to enjoy their melodious voices and gave gifts like garments and vessels to them.[2]

Having heard about Kusa and Lava singing the 'story of Rama', Rama called them and asked them to sing in his court assembly. "These sons of ascetics glow with royal features. Their singing is making me happy", said Rama.

The beginning of the actual story in *Ramayana*

Of all the kings who ruled this earth, those who belonged to the Ikshvaku dynasty are very great. They never knew defeat in wars. The earth appeared as if it came into existence merely for the sake of the Ikshvakus. Of them, king Sagara was very famous. The ocean was born because of him. He had 60,000 sons. If the father went to war, all those sons used to accompany him.[3]

Kosala belonged to the Ikshvakus. It is close to the river Sarayu. Of all the cities in that country Ayodhya was the greatest city. Vaivasvata Manu established it. For all Ikshvaku kings Ayodhya had been the capital city. The city looked as if it was carved. A king named Dasaratha, who was highly skilled in expanding the kingdom, used to live in Ayodhya.[4]

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[2] Singing of the *Ramayana* by Kusa and Lava does not mean that they sang only the *Ramayana*. We have to notice here the very poor life of rural folk who roam around villages, sing many kinds of stories and live on the alms and old garments which the listeners donated.

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[3] In the ancient times, when people lived in Gens and tribes, they used to die very often due to attacks of wild animals and enemies. In such a stage, people used to wish to have more people in each Gen and tribe. It is necessary to have a large number of people in order to wage wars against the enemy tribes and conquer them and also to increase production. Having 60,000 sons is a story form of the desire to have large number of people. Note that the sons accompany the father in wars.

[4] 'A king who was highly skilled in expanding the kingdom! What is that skill? How will a kingdom 'expand'? Only if he annexes the other kingdoms. Which means, Dasaratha was skilled in attacking the neighbouring territories, waging wars and occupying them! The poet is describing invasion as great valour!

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There is a rampart around Ayodhya just as women have a golden belt round their waist. There are war machines. There are canons.

The city was full of multi-storied mansions. There was no dearth for food in the city even if drought or long drawn battles took place any number of times. Kubera-like traders who came there from different countries carry on trade in this city. There were many subsidiary kings. There were many troupes of female dancers. There were no atheists in the city. There was none who is not loyal to the king.

In that city, all Brahmins were the best persons. All were like great sages. All the Kshatriyas were great warriors. They could kill tigers and lions merely with their hands. Dasaratha was ruling Ayodhya which was filled with such Brahmins and Kshatriyas, as Indra ruled heaven.

In that city all the Kshatriyas followed the commands of Brahmins. All the Vysyas followed the orders of Kshatriyas. Sudras served Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vysyas. (Descriptions concerning 'citizens' of Ayodhya related to the first three varnas (castes) only. Not related to Sudras. Sudras are servants of other castes.)

There were thousands and millions of horses and elephants.

Dasaratha had seven ministers. (Sumantra was one of them). Vasista and Vamadeva were two priests. They also discharged the duties of ministers. Jabali is merely a counselor. They also assisted the king in filling the royal treasury with money, gold and gems; in disciplining the four-wings of the army. They were very skilled in declaring wars and arriving at truce. With such ministers, Dasaratha ruled Kosala.

King Dasaratha did not have sons. "It will be good if I perform horse-sacrifice to beget sons", thought Dasaratha. (Did he not perform 'sacrifice of a horse' (*Aswameedha yaaga*) until then? The story begins with the sacrifice of a horse') He at once called Sumantra and asked him to summon ministers, and priests. Jabali, Vasista and all came.

"I want to perform a sacrifice to get sons", said Dasaratha.

Vasista discussed this with priests and said, "Yes. Your intention is good. Do it. Sons will definitely be born. Dasaratha looked at the ministers and ordered, "Make all arrangements necessary for sacrifice".

Then Dasaratha went to his wives and said, "I am performing a sacrifice for the sake of begetting sons. You must follow the rules of observance for it also".

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Then Sumantra said to Dasaratha as follows: "Oh, King! I have heard this idea of Vasista for begetting sons in the form of a legend. In the past, sage Sanatkumara narrated a story to other sages as follows: Kashyapa has a son named Vibhandaka. A son called Rishyasringa will be born to Vibhanda. Except the forest in which he lives, he will not know that there is a vast world around him. He will not know that there exist towns and cities and there will be various kinds of men and things. He will become an adult without seeing any other human being except his father.[5]

At that time, a king called Romapada ruled Angadesa. Owing to his unjust behaviour, there were no rains in his kingdom. (*No mention of the particulars of that unjust behaviour. It seems, kings also behave in an unjust manner occasionally; but Brahmins never behave in an unjust manner*). Priests tell the king that rains would fall if he could bring Rishyasringa to the country. Romapada feels happy and sends prostitutes ('*ganika*') for Rishyasringa. They meet Rishyasringa when he is alone, give him various kinds of food stuffs, mislead him and bring him to Angadesa. As soon as Rishyasringa arrives in Angadesa, rains fall and crops grow.

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[5] In the ancient, primitive times, human beings used to spend generations without knowing that there was a vast world away from their place of living. The story of Rishyasringa is a reflection of such a situation. There is a mention of Rishyasringa's father but not of his mother. ★

Romapada married his daughter Shanta to Rishyasringa.[6]

Rishyasringa remains in Angadesa along with his wife.

A king named Dasaratha would be born in the Ikshvaku dynasty. He would go to Romapada and ask him, "Send Rishyasringa to our country. I would like Rishyasringa to help me perform a sacrifice". Romapada would agree and send Rishyasringa. After the sacrifice by Dasaratha, four sons would be born" — Sage Sanatkumara said all this a long time ago. Hence, king Dasaratha! Call Rishyasringa and perform sacrifice" — said Sumantra. (*It seems Rishyasringa is a relative of Sumantra. He is trying to get an opportunity of organising a sacrifice for Rishyasringa to perform.*)

Dasaratha thought that Vasista might feel jealous, if he calls another Brahmin and gets sacrifice done. So he called Vasista, told the story which Sanatkumara had narrated, took Vasista's permission to do and went to Rishyasringa.

Romapada felt happy to see Dasaratha and said to Rishyasringa, "Dasaratha is our friend". Rishyasringa greeted Dasaratha respectfully. Dasaratha insisted that Rishyasringa alone should supervise his sacrifice and took Shanta and Rishyasringa to his country.[7]

A year passed and the sacrificial horse roamed in various countries and came back. The sacrifice began on the bank of the river Sarayu. All the Brahmins came there along with a hundred disciples each. The naked ascetics also came.[8]

Women and children ate food again and again and enjoyed eating. Mountains of food were offered in the sacrifice.

The total number of animals tied to the sacrificial pillars was three hundred. The foremost of the best horses of Dasaratha was also tied along with them. Kausalya spent the whole night with that horse.[9]

Then the brain of the horse was burnt in the fire. Later all the limbs of the horse were burnt in the fire.

Dasaratha donated his entire land to the sacrificial priests. They gave back that land to the king and received gold and silver. Dasaratha gave away all that he had with him in charity. After everything was donated, a poor Brahmin came and asked for charity. Then he gave away the ornament which he was wearing on his wrist.[10]

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[6] In these stories, we occasionally notice marriages between sons of sages and daughters of Kshatriyas and between kings and daughters of Brahmins. We can interpret in such a way that, before castes emerged in their specific and crystallized form, individuals pursuing one occupation married those belonging to other occupations. In the period in which a story occurs or in the period in which a character lives, we find a mixture of customs related to many past periods. ★

[7] **Bala kanda, sarga 11, sloka 17:** In the context where Romapada told Rishyasringa about Dasaratha, some translators have translated as if Romapada told that 'Shanta's natural father was Dasaratha'. (Based on the words 'sakhyam' and 'sambandhakam'). There is a belief among people that Shanta was Dasaratha's daughter and Rama's elder sister. But, in the Sanskrit sloka it is not so.

[8] With reference to 'naked ascetics', we may understand as follows: In the primitive days, human beings lived naked for a long time. In course of wearing leaves, animal skin and bark garments, all people did not wear any thing. Two ways existed: some people used to wear some thing while some people remained naked. Roaming nakedly still exists as a holy custom of ancient times. ★

[9] **Bala kanda, sarga 14, sloka 12:** "Kausalya spent that night with that sacrificial horse, along with other queens" — No details beyond this are given. We can understand this as a religious belief. As if Kausalya sat near the horse. But, some critics interpret it as if "Kausalya spent that night with that horse sexually". There isn't anything that one can achieve by such vulgar interpretations. ★

[10] Even though he was a Brahmin, if he was poor, he wouldn't benefit from the sacrifices and charity except get a bangle or any wrist ornament or a fistful of alms! But the substantial donation of land, cows and everything went to the priestly class or rich Brahmins. Poor Brahmins didn't get any such things. ★

After horse-sacrifice was over, Rishyasringa thought for a while and said to Dasaratha. "O king! There is a sacrifice called '*Putra kaameeshti*' (sacrifice to beget sons)". Rishyasringa started the sacrifice. (Why did he conduct horse sacrifice before? Now, Putra kaameeshti? He should have conducted it before. This is a tactic to make the king give donations and charity to all the priests. Even Rishyasringa who lived in the forest innocently had become a clever fellow!)

Gods, demigods, singers and musicians and dancers — all came to attend Dasaratha's sacrifice for sons. All of them cried out in the presence of Brahma who has also come there. "You gave boons to a Rakshasa called Ravana in the past. That fellow is harassing all the worlds". Then Brahma said, "Don't worry. Ravana did not ask for a boon that he should not die at the hands of a human being. Therefore, he will die at the hands of a human being".

At this moment, Lord Vishnu also arrived with a conch shell and a wheel in the hands. All the gods prayed to Vishnu. Vishnu gave them an assurance, "Don't worry! I'll take the birth of a human being, kill Ravana and rule this earth". He had determined to be born as one of the four sons of Dasaratha.

A great man, who came out of the altar of sacrificial fire brought *paayasam*, a sweet made of milk and rice in a golden vessel, gave it to Dasaratha and said, "Distribute this among your wives. You will get sons". Saying so, he disappeared. (*He disappeared immediately, because, perhaps they might take him to task if sons are not born.*)

Dasaratha felt very happy and gave *half* of it to Kausalya. Of the remaining half, he gave a *quarter* to Sumitra. Of the remaining quarter, he gave *half quarter* to Kaikeyi and another *half quarter* again to Sumitra.[11]

The queens ate the 'Paayasam' and became pregnant. Thus, after Lord Vishnu entered the wombs of Dasaratha's wives, gods, Gandharvas (singers and musicians), Siddhas (demigods) and Charanas (dancers) gave birth to millions of monkeys (Vanaras) and bears as per Brahma's command. All of them were born great warriors.

Then Kausalya gave birth to Rama. Rama represents half of the essence of Lord Vishnu. Then Kaikeyi gave birth to Bharata. Bharata represents half quarter of Vishnu's essence. Then Lakshmana and Satrughna were born to Sumitra. They represent a quarter and half!

After the sons were born, Dasaratha donated innumerable things to Brahmins in a Joyous mood.

Dasaratha's sons began growing up. They became experts in all kinds of skills. Rama became the greatest of all. He had a special liking for archery.

Lakshmana always accompanied and followed Rama. Similarly, Satrughna always followed Bharata.

Days passed and Dasaratha was happy about the progress of his sons. He began thinking of getting his sons married.

While this was so, one day, Viswamitra came to Ayodhya to meet king Dasaratha.

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[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

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11. Observe Dasaratha's distribution. What is the secret behind such a special way of distribution? If he gave the *Paayasam* (sweet) to all the three wives equally, Rama would have become equal to others. Then every thing would get upset. Therefore, first half to Kausalya. That is, Rama is the half part of Vishnu. Dasaratha could have given the remaining Paayasam equally to the other wives. Then also, things would have got upset. This is how it happened: Sumitra must get two sons in the story. Kaikeyi would get one son. If he gave the sweet equally to Kaikeyi and Sumitra, each would have got a quarter. Then Kaikeyi's son Bharata would singly represent a quarter of Vishnu whereas the two sons of Sumitra would together represent a quarter of Vishnu. It seems that the poet does not like this! It appears that the poet intended to make Lakshmana more representative of Vishnu's essence than Bharata. Hence, he created Bharata with a half quarter and Lakshmana and Satrughna with a 'half quarter and half'. Other than this, no reason appears here, according to the story. Here, it appears that Dasaratha had three wives. But, the number of wives of this king is not this much. Add another 350 to the three. 353 in all! This, we will know in Ayodhya kanda. (sarga 39, sloka 36). What is this calculation that a king has 353 wives! Think about it! ★

Story-1

This is *Ramayana*!

King Dasaratha was chatting happily with a couple of his ministers and priests in his palace on an afternoon. After discussing various matters, he fondly referred to his sons' playing and recreation and said, "The children are fourteen years old, we must get them married now. You must look for matches that are befitting our status and reputation". Saying so, Dasaratha looked eagerly at Vasista, Vamadeva and Sumantra. All expressed their happiness, "Amen! Amen!"

"We can certainly do so," agreed Vasista.

Meanwhile, two guards came rushing in nervously, all the time bowing and paying obeisance to those present and announced — "Your Majesty! The sage Viswamitra has arrived!"

The King sprang up suddenly, "What, is it really sage Viswamitra? How fortunate I am! Where? Where is he?" He started forth.

Ministers and priests followed the King. All knelt devoutly before Viswamitra, who appeared with an ascetic staff and a bowl, a fist of a hair-knot, hands and neck decked with a small garland of rosaries, in coarse clothes and a stern look.

Overwhelmed with joy, showing him in with folded hands, Dasaratha invited him saying "*Brahmana* sage! I am honoured by your visit. My kingdom is purified. Please do come in"

The address 'Brahmana sage' gave Viswamitra extreme pleasure to his ears and he smiled. Vasista and all other ascetics declared their happiness saying "We are blessed, Lord of all ascetics! Today we have the good fortune of beholding you." -- Content with the reception that began with great devotion and humility, Viswamitra stepped forward, smilingly nodding his head in appreciation.

Accompanying the sage, King Dasaratha tried to please Viswamitra by expressing his joy at his visit with various descriptive analogies – –"Aha! O Best among the Brahmins! You are the personification of meditation shining like a cluster of lights. What good fortune of mine! My lord! Your arrival has given me the kind of happiness a man experiences at the birth of a son through his wife, no matter how many liaisons he may have had with other women. The good fortune of seeing you has given me the same kind of happiness one feels if one has a windfall of wealth comes without any relation to one's personal effort or ability.

Viswamitra put up his hand in order to please the king saying, "May you be blessed with all good fortune", and entered the palace blessing him at every step.

Maid servants, looking like nymphs, brought cool water in gold plates, washed Viswamitra's feet, dried them with yellow silk garments and placed them on a carpet of flowers. — Vasista offered water in a gold bowl for washing hands. After the blandishments of washing up, the sage Viswamitra sat down on a high royal seat with a smile. Along with the King, the ministers and the priests stood deferentially around him.

Some other maid servants arranged before the Brahmana sage several kinds of luscious fruits and delicious foods, the very sight of which can tempt the palates of even ascetics, in golden plates studded with precious stones more valued than human life. — The King with folded hands implored, "Please part take of something, My Lord! How far you must have travelled! You may not have had anything on the way! Please do eat My Lord!"

Smilingly Viswamitra refused all the fruits, but tossed a delicious sweet that resembled a *Jileebi* into his mouth politely offered food to the others saying, "Vasista! Please have them".

Everyone sat down and happily feasted on the foods served by the attendants.

Though Dasaratha's face was glowing with happiness, his heart was troubled by the doubt, 'why the sage had suddenly come on a visit?'

Although he was nodding his head genially, Viswamitra too had a doubt and thought, "I hope there won't be any hurdle in achieving the purpose of my visit". Vasista and the ministers too were indulging in their own speculation.

As he could not bear the silence, Dasaratha said, "Your arrival has blessed Ayodhya, My Lord!". He expressed his joy for the tenth time again.

"May you be blessed with all good fortune," Viswamitra blessed the King for the tenth time. "All's well, I hope?" he moved into enquiring about the welfare of the king. "Have you occupied any new territories? Have you defeated all your enemies?", he enquired with a smile.[12]

The King replied with slight disappointment "I am eager to conquer lands, My Lord, but my age….", he hesitated.

"What's age got to do with it, Your Majesty? Your army with the four arms of infantry, cavalry, elephants and war chariots are not old. If your ministers are loyal…"

"I beg forgiveness of the Brahmana Sage!" Sumantra stood up, saluted and submitted in all humility, "There may be some truth in thinking that the King has neglected the campaigns caught in the delights of his children. But Lord of the ascetics must recognise that the enemy kings are also powerful".

Viswamitra nodded in agreement, gave up that topic and enormously pleased the King, "So be it Your Majesty! Your sons are worthy. They will finish the work which you stopped". He put another question, "Are all your vassals duly submissive to you?"

Taking umbrage, Dasaratha said, "How can they dare defy the King and demand freedom? Every year they pay tributes *to the last, worn out coin*. They desire to live under our imperial control in perpetuity. But…", he hesitated.

"What?"

"In some eastern provinces people some times ….."

"Are there disturbances?" Viswamitra asked, disturbed.

Sumantra rose heroically and explained, "Disturbances? Can rebellions by some bands of traitors against the king be called disturbances? Will the imperial leader keep quiet? Are we not sending in innumerable troops often into the fiefdoms to suppress rebellions and establish peace?".

"Good, Good. Dasaratha! Your chief minister is a befitting one for you. Vedas say that *even a small snake should be killed with a big stick*! A king must never be weak. You must not tolerate people's rebellions. Then, are you looking after heroes and scholars by generously gifting them grain and gold? That's very important indeed!"

"Yes, My Lord! I am following the commands of Vasista. I am keeping poets, artists, and heroes pleased by frequently gifting them, honouring them and bestowing important positions on them. They are always loyal to us."

"Yes. They will not give up their craving for comfort. That much care is adequate in their case. Are you performing sacrifices and rituals as prescribed in the scriptures?"

"Yes, My Lord! Can there any shortcoming there in this kingdom as far as Vedic rites are concerned?"

"It must never happen. A king who displeases the gods, sages and Brahmins will not last long."

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[12] **Bala kanda, Sarga 19, Sloka 45:** Viswamitra makes many enquiries about the well being of Dasaratha — about his riches and wealth; treasury and enemies. "I hope all are well in your kingdom. I think your treasury is full and unspent. Are your chiefs obedient to you? Have all your enemies been defeated ? I hope the sacrificial and Vedic rites are being conducted without any problem" — These are the questions which sages put first whenever they visit a king. That the king has to conquer enemies, annex others' kingdoms and expand his riches and wealth! They shower blessing and wish them progress in that direction! ★

"I understand. Every year I invite Brahmins and sages from all over and gift them cattle, land, maidens and gold — whatever they desire — and keep them happy."

Viswamitra was satisfied, nodded his head in appreciation, and said with a smile, "A king must not worry that his treasury is depleting because of the alms to Brahmins. If your ministers are capable, they can promptly raise money!"

As he was continuing, another minister rose respectfully with folded hands and submitted, "The great sage must excuse us. As you expect we are keeping the king happy by regularly imposing taxes on people and filling up the treasury."

"Very good. If sacrifices and such other rituals are not encouraged all over the kingdom, atheists will, indeed, *crop up like weeds*."

"It's our duty to snip such heads that arise, My Lord! Are we such atheists to tolerate atheists?" The minister replied satisfactorily.

Viswamitra, with a smile, expressed a doubt, "Dasaratha! Your ministers are so competent! I don't have any doubts about your rule, but I wonder if Brahmins are not making Sudras perform rites?" Said the same Viswamitra, who bestowed the eligibility to perform sacrificial rites on a *Chandala*, an untouchable, before he himself became a Brahmin.

Dasaratha, in all humility with folded hands, wailed "What unmet needs do Brahmins have in my kingdom that they resort to such impropriety, My Lord?" he wailed.

Viswamitra set his garland of rosaries right, popped a piece of sweet made of cream, settled down more comfortably in his seat and showered questions on intermixture of castes with a sweetened tongue: "Your Majesty! Are all the *Kshastriyas* (warrior castes) worshipping Brahmins in your kingdom? Are the *Vysyas* (merchant castes) respecting the Kshatriyas? Are the *Sudras* serving everyone? I hope there is no intermixture of castes anywhere?". He rained questions at the king.

The last question bothered Dasaratha a little. Because a couple of months back, while Dasaratha was out on an evening walk, he saw a Sudra woman carrying a pot of water, enamoured by her, he brought her and kept her in his harem. With confidence that except Vasista and Sumantra no one else knew of the fact, Dasaratha recovering and intending to respond with dignity began pacing the floor. "Intermixture of castes? Can such an atrocity occur in the Kosala kingdom? I'll narrate an incident to you. Please listen, My Lord! The other day, a girl from a royal family, in her youthfulness, was infatuated to a Vysya boy and wanted to marry him. Parents, relatives, elders, priests, everyone tried to dissuade her in many ways. But these two, owing to their ignorance of what's right and what's wrong, fled the city and married in the presence of a pagan goddess as witness. But Vedas and other related scriptures, *Vedangas*, decry such a despicable act as an invalid marriage. When the girl's father complained to us immediately, we thought "How dare they? Can such an impropriety occur in our kingdom? Such intermarriage?" My ministers were deeply worried and without any negligence or delay, sent hundreds of soldiers to search for them. The very next day the soldiers returned successfully having captured them. Our judges sentenced the boy to rigorous imprisonment. The elders married off the young woman according to the scriptures to a suitable rich man". Thus concluding, Dasaratha stood preening with pride at preventing intermixture of castes.

"Amen!" said Viswamitra, greatly pleased. But the fact that the girl killed herself the next morning did not reach the great King. Even if it did, it won't reach the great sage.

Viswamitra, slightly worried, cautioned the king, "Ignorant populace always indulge in some improper activity. It is the king's duty to prevent these and *ensure that justice is upheld on its four pedestals*. That is why a king must gather intelligence about people's activities through spies. Oh, King, I have another doubt. Are people loyal to the king? Are women fulfilling their specific religious obligations regularly? Are sons respecting their fathers?

Are wives worshipping and obeying their husbands? Are the illiterates happy listening to the *Puranas*? Your Majesty must always find out all these things", cautioned Viswamitra.

Though the sermons which Viswamitra delivered between the questions on his welfare, caused discomfort, the old king who all his life had ruled the kingdom, pretended to be overwhelmed by happiness and said, "Brahmana sage! Because of your kindness to me you are asking so many questions about my welfare. I am blessed! Right from the beginning I did not have any difficulty in ruling the kingdom. All my kith and kin hold important positions in my kingdom and act as my *right hand men*. My ministers are trustworthy, loyal and aid me in my plans for expansion of the kingdom and management of the vassal provinces. The four forces of my army always exude enthusiasm to attack the enemy states. My treasury is filled with unlimited riches and grains. The armouries are full of unlimited weapons and cannons. There are innumerable chariots, horses, and elephants in my possession. Having no courage to complain against anything, people are living obediently and submissively. On the advice of the priests, I perform Vedic rites and with the blessing of the finest Brahmins, I am ruling my kingdom." The king announced his superiority in enjoyment.

Viswamitra, nodding his head, poked fun at him, "You are very capable. But then even a Great king like you, I hope, is giving in to the commands of the priests."

"Lord of ascetics can verify that from any priest or Vedic scholar in this court", replied Dasaratha, feeling slightly snubbed.

Vasista, intervened and smilingly said, "Viswamitra! The Great King Dasaratha is familiar with the finer points of duties, virtues and law. It is not fair on the part of the Lord of the sages to test him so much".

With a view to please Dasaratha, Viswamitra said, "O King! I am greatly pleased by your administration that's prospering, endowed with all the best qualities. That is why Lord Vishnu has been born to you. May all good fortune visit you!" He raised his hand in blessing.

Dasaratha was delighted at Viswamitra's statement that even god is on Dasaratha's side because god is pleased at the rule of the king in accordance with the scriptures.

In the course of the conversation Viswamitra finished the food edibles offered on four plates and drank four silver mugs full of whole creamy milk and reclined contentedly on his seat with half-closed eyes. " O King! May victory be with you!", he uttered a blessing, unable to lift his hand in blessing, due to *the burden of having eaten so much.*

Once again the reason for Viswamitra's visit began to nag Dasaratha. After a little hesitation, he prayed, "O Brahmana sage! Please reveal the purpose of your kind visit to this servant. I will consider it my duty to fulfil your command".

"Brahmana sage!" Hearing this mode of address made Viswamitra tingle with joy. His heart became a sea of happiness because the world had recognised him as a Brahmin. Overwhelmed with joy, Viswamitra, momentarily forgot his fatigue caused due to over-eating and bent forward and said, "O King! I have begun a sacred sacrificial observance. It seems that I only begin it but do not have the good fortune of completing it and honouring the gods....", he paused.

"Why? What is the hurdle? Can even the sacrificial observance begun by Viswamitra too face hurdles?" The king and the others expressed surprise.

"O King! Don't you know the lives we lead in the forests? Isn't it very difficult to accomplish the work we undertake in the midst of Rakshasas who disrupt sacrificial rites?"

"O Great Sage! You could have cursed those wretched Rakshasas?"

"I shouldn't. That's the condition of that sacrificial observance. You cannot be angry while performing this rite. Cannot curse anyone. Or else? Wouldn't I have cursed the lowly Rakshasas to become bugs or lizards? Thinking that conditions were suitable I commenced the sacrificial rites many a time. I am fed up with the sudden disruptions. Finally, after thinking seriously about it, I set out from my hermitage to meet you."

"Your pleasure! What is your command?"

Viswamitra turned away and kept silent.

"Why do you hesitate, My Lord ? Am I not bound by the commands of the Brahmins? Do you not know that it is not in our lineage to go back on our promises?"

"Don't I know, King? Being born in the Raghu-lineage how can you go back on your promises? Would you tell a lie even if the sun were to rise in the west? I am hesitating because it may alarm you. Please do listen carefully and understand the issue. Send your eldest son – Rama – with me! That's why I have come."

Everyone was dismayed.

Dasaratha was stunned.

"Rama? Should I send Rama to conquer those Rakshasas? Alas, why are you teasing an old man, My Lord?"

Viswamitra decided to be ruthless right from the beginning. He said, "Have I come all the way here to joke with you, Your Majesty! Did I not tell you not to be alarmed right in the beginning? I have thought this through in various ways and have come for Rama. If I myself get into combat with the enemy, I was disrupting my own sacrificial rites. Moreover, I will have to face the accusation of the people that even after becoming a Brahmana sage, Viswamitra has not given up his anger. O King! Repose faith in me! Do not hesitate because Rama is young. He will be safe under my care. I will teach him all skills. I will give him invincible weapons. I will stay in the background and get the work done by him", said Viswamitra, keenly observing Dasaratha's face.

Dasaratha, with increased agony said, "Oh, no! This is not in jest then? Are my ears hearing the real words being spoken? O great sage! Till recently the maids would narrate stories about Rakshasas to put the children to bed. A child who is scared of the stories, how will he fight the Rakshasas? He is still at the age of having fun and playing games. He has still not fully learnt archery. How will he estimate the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy? Is there anything stranger than this? O great sage Viswamitra! What can you achieve with such a child? I myself will come with you to suppress the Rakshasas. Will you be happy?" He looked at Viswamitra with hope.

"Do you think that Rakshasas are your vassals, to cow down by your threats? What wars will you fight at your age?"

"I will send all the four forces of my army. My soldiers are supreme warriors. They are highly valiant. Experts at war, capable, brave."

"Your Majesty! Do you speak to me of your salaried army? How can they stand up against the brave Rakshasas who put their lives at stake and fight?"

Mortified, Dasaratha asked eagerly, " Who are those brave ones? What are their strengths and weaknesses? What is the objective of their fight?"

Viswamitra adjusting his garland of rosaries and changing his staff from under one arm to the other, said sarcastically, "The objective of their fight is to oppose the performance of sacred Vedic rites. Isn't it the born characteristic of the wretched Rakshasas, O Mighty King? More than achieving their objective, it is tormenting the gods and Brahmins that gives them great joy." He observed for changes in Dasaratha's facial expressions.

"Do they have a leader?"

"Have you not heard of the ruler of Lanka, Ravana?"

"Ravana?" The king was astounded. The priests rested back in their seats gingerly. Ministers looked at each other in anxiety.

"He is intoxicated with arrogance because of the boons which Brahma has given him. He commands even the gods. When he goes for a walk in the orchard, the breeze must give up its intensity and blow gently, the Sun must reduce his glare and glow gently; the sea must curb its roar and move peacefully. He won't tolerate it if sages dally with the heavenly maidens! Can anyone, anywhere contemplate performing the sacrificial rites? It is the objective of his Rakshasa rule to suppress gods, sages and Brahmins."

A shiver began to build up inside Dasaratha. His silk clothes made of large brocade flowers concealed the trembling of his body from the others. "Thank goodness, I haven't started on a battle". He felt pleased. But the next moment he sighed in a weak voice, "I cannot, indeed, win against Ravana, against whom even gods and Gandharvas cannot stand up. But then, between you and me, when Brahma himself chooses to give boons to him, who can be victorious against the Rakshasa king?"

Viswamitra rebuked him, "Being a great king, why are you talking like an ignoramus? Except Lord Vishnu, don't you know that Brahma and Siva do not have the ability to completely save anyone even if they themselves have given the boons?"

Vasista with a soft voice intervened and elucidated the intricacies of virtue, duty, law etc. "Oh Great King! It is Brahma who has given the boon to Ravana. Again it is the same Brahma who has given the idea to put an end to him. He gave the boon out of embarrassment that Ravana undertook severe penance to please him, otherwise, why would Brahma have any friendship and affection towards the Rakshasa king? Why would Brahma do something that could cause lasting damage to the gods and the Brahmins whom gods worship them? There is nothing wrong if some one with four mouths, speaks in four ways, isn't it? Even if Ravana is a great hero, don't think that he will not die".

Encouraged, Viswamitra said, "There's no immediate need to clash with Ravana, O King! He is using only his followers carelessly in disruptive activities against Vedic rites. Especially, Tataka, Maricha and Subahu are the most troublesome in the vicinity of our hermitage. They should be killed first". He observed the king's face keenly.

The king slid into deep depression once again. "Alas I cannot live away from my Rama even for a moment! O great sage! I begot Rama after hankering for an offspring for many years and after undertaking many religious rituals. How can I send my dear son to fight with the Rakshasas?" He bent his head and wept.

The king's attitude was *like adding fuel to fire*, and Viswamitra flared up, as it was not the time of performing sacrifice. "Your Majesty! Your attitude is like *telling* me *about one's mother's family to the maternal uncle*. You speak as if you begot your children through your masculinity? Wasn't Rama born to destroy the race of Rakshasas on earth? It is primarily to kill Ravana that Lord Vishnu has been born as Rama? You seem to have forgotten everything! Isn't Rama the heir to this vast empire after you! Do you want to confine the prince to fun and games like an incompetent fellow while there's unrest in one corner of the kingdom? Don't you know that people's uprisings must be suppressed promptly? You have lost your wisdom due to old age. You are unable to grasp things despite a lot of explanation. All right! I shall leave. Let the entire earth become the kingdom of Rakshasas that will not allow shelter to the gods and Brahmins. Let your reputation be illuminated for generations by the fame of breaking a promise!" Viswamitra stood up shaking with uncontrollable anger, as it was not the time for performing sacrificial rituals.

Vasista got up with alacrity and made Viswamitra take a seat in peace. "Calm down Brahmana sage! Calm down!" With great effort he persuaded the Brahmana sage, who had conquered anger, to calm down.

He approached Dasaratha and said, "Your Majesty! Why should you be afflicted by the misfortune of going back on your word? You were unable to estimate the power of this Brahmana sage. It does not matter whether Rama does or does not know archery as long as he is under the care of this sage. No one else on earth knows about the number and variety of weapons, which this sage knows. To eliminate the Rakshasas, he is capable of creating new weapons also. He is hesitating to engage your four forces and the full complement of your army because others may mock him thus, "Why do sages who perform penance in forests indulge in war?" Others won't accuse him if he gives all his weapons to others and gets his work done from them. He wants the prince to benefit from the good he wishes to do. He will kill Rakshasas using Rama as we kill a snake with a stick. The doer of the action is will be Viswamitra. Do recognise that it is the Brahmins who dictate and protect justice that govern the world. Don't the Brahmins always wish for the welfare of empires?" Vasista attempted to convince him calmly.

Dasaratha did not appear to have heard what was said by Vasista. Without expressing either willingness or unwillingness, he sat in mournful silence.

The smile on Vasista's face had not dissipated. He looked at Viswamitra encouragingly and said to Dasaratha again, "Your Majesty! Haven't you heard that according to the scriptures, there's no greater sin than going back on one's word? All these days, you have performed many sacrificial rites. You have regularly worshipped and observed religious rituals. You have served Brahmins and honoured guests, given away food and clothes as alms. You have had wells and tanks dug, got bridges and rest houses built. When you should be earning salvation without rebirth because of all these philanthropic deeds, do you want to render all the merit you have earned so far to go waste just by going back on your word now? Do you want to be reborn again and again into this wretched world to experience worldly miseries?" Vasista looked at Dasaratha with compassion.

Trembling, Dasaratha sank into deep thought.

'Is this the reward for spending enormous amounts of money and performing virtuous deeds? Wasn't it to earn piety for my self rather than please the gods that I performed sacrificial rites? Wasn't it to earn piety for my self that I had honoured guests rather than a real concern for the comfort of the guests? Hadn't I got wells and tanks dug to provide drinking water for people? You must be joking! It was to earn piety for my self. Hadn't I got bridges built to facilitate easy travel for people? It was to earn piety for myself. If it was all for the people , then a lot more than what the scriptures prescribe had yet to be done. Why would any king perform deeds that are not considered pious and not in accordance with the scriptures? What is the sense in losing piety earned by performing many good deeds? This Brahmana sage had earned titles but had not reduced his temper even a little bit. How can I predict what he will do? If he curses me to become a cat or a lizard, why should I go through such misery in this old age? Things will happen according to one's luck. What can I do? There's that Lord Vishnu for everything', he sighed! Nodding his head humbly, he saluted and said to Viswamitra, "Brahmana sage! I have behaved like an ignoramus, unable to control my affection. Forgive me. I will send Rama, as you desire." He turned to the maids and ordered, "Call Rama here".

Viswamitra's face appeared spotless like the moon after an eclipse, calm and devoid of all anger.

Every one breathed easy in his place.

Vasista continued to describe Viswamitra's prowess till Rama arrived. "Your Majesty! Before he became a Brahmin, Viswamitra had done some improper deeds due to ignorance. It is true that he defied priests like me and got a *Chandala,* an untouchable to perform sacrificial rites. He defied gods and *counter-created creation.* To help others, he often used up all his power derived from penance unnecessarily and delayed attaining the status of Brahmana sage. But after attaining the status of Brahmana sage, he has become a complete repository of wisdom. He realised that Vedic rites must be performed only according to the scriptures. He realised that caste differences must be followed without any scope for admixture. He realised all the worldly precepts and hence received admiration from chaste wives and the Brahmins. If at any time an upheaval occurred in the world, he had amassed innumerable numbers of weapons to protect the sages and punish the Rakshasas. O King Dasaratha! You should be rejoicing to hand over Rama to a great man like him!", he explained.

Dasaratha to a large extent appeared pleased. "O great sage Vasista! At this late age, because I am spending my time without any worry, frolicking with my children, I am unable to live without Rama. But I am not averse to killing Rakshasas", he submitted.

When every one was eagerly waiting for Rama, he came in with a smile. Lakshmana, right behind him! As they arrived, they paid obeisance to every one humbly and came to stand by their father. Both the brothers were of the endearing age of fourteen. Both were extremely good looking with large eyes, full cheeks and broad foreheads, curly hair, long crimson coloured marks on the forehead with glittering silk clothes! Their body was bedecked with jewellery made of diamonds and emeralds! The only difference between them was their complexion. If Rama was like the blue sky, Lakshmana was like the morning sun. Since they had come from a ball game, they were sweating slightly, breathing hard, as they stood there innocently, calmly, with a smile.

Dasaratha looked at Rama intently, with moist eyes he drew him close, kissed his forehead and said, "My dear child! I have called you here on a royal mission. The great Sage Viswamitra has come here out of kindness to you, to take you with him. I have promised him to send you along with him. You have to go to his hermitage." He hung his head with a sense of guilt.

Rama blotted the sweat on his forehead with his waistcloth. The ball game was going on with great spirit in the garden. Bharata, Satrughna and their friends were on the other side and were ready to win. In the meanwhile, there was this summons from the father! "I'll be back right away, stop the game" Rama had told his friends and had come to his father thinking that he could return in a moment, but here suddenly, his father wanted him to go to the forest along with some sage on some royal mission!

Now, into the forest, leaving all his friends. The garden was full of birds and deer – leaving all of them would be hard!

In the harem, there are mother, aunts, maids – their stories, innumerable songs, dances, laughter and he would leave all these! Why to those forests? What had he to do with a royal mission? Someone else could be sent instead, he felt!

Lakshmana was also thinking the same and was trying to signal to his brother with his eyes, "Let's not go, brother!"

Rama stood silently without looking at any one.

His displeasure was clearly visible from his facial expression.

Viswamitra looked at Vasista in agitation.

Vasista gave a warning look to Dasaratha.

Dasaratha, disturbed at Rama's attitude, said "My son! Why are you hesitating? Born as a prince, can you escape these royal missions? Sage Vasista, Sumantra and I have thought this through before we called you for this job."

Rama kept quiet without replying to his father. Dasaratha considered his son's silence as an insult. "So far no son in our Raghu dynasty has ever defied his father's orders. Now, if you refuse to go, you will be of disobeying your father's orders and I will be breaking my promise. My son! Should all the piety that I have earned go waste like this?" Dasaratha begged a very young lad to help him save the 'piety' he had earned.

Rama, unable to bear the pitiable state of his father, inspired by the idea of holding up the prestige of his lineage and a reward of reaching holy worlds after death, paid obeisance to his father saying, "Send me as per your wish. Let me have the privilege of obeying my father's command. I will not disobey your orders."

Lakshmana also forgot his disappointment and stood content.

Viswamitra's face cleared up with courage, and he blessed Rama, "Rama! May all good befall you. You, who respect elders and the sages, will become a great king and earn great repute."

The priests and ministers felt happy too. Immediately the news of Rama's imminent departure reached the harem.

Kausalya worried a good deal and sighed, "In comparison with the strategies of the sages, and decisions of the kings, women — even though they are mothers — are insignificant".

Travel arrangements were made rapidly. The friends who were playing the ball game came, looking for Rama and Lakshmana with the ball. Looking at the sudden arrangements for their travel, they stood distressed, unable to ask any questions.

Rama stood humbly before his father, carrying his bow and arrows. Lakshmana was also ready to go with him.

Giving advice to Rama, Dasaratha preached the sermon, "My son! From now on, it is Viswamitra who is your revered teacher. You should be bound by his command. Do as he says. Do not question what he says. Do not argue and counter-argue with him." Drawing Lakshmana close to him, Dasaratha dinned wisdom into him, saying "Son! Just as the living soul does not exist without the Eternal Soul, don't ever leave your brother. Serving your brother is your great good fortune." Rama and Lakshmana stood in front of Viswamitra.

Dasaratha's eyes welled up with tears and turned into pools.

Every one's heart turned into a *sea of sadness*.

Viswamitra, getting up from his seat, picking up his staff and rosaries in readiness for the journey joked with Dasaratha saying, "King Dasaratha! Why do you grieve like an ignoramus? You will see how I will transform Rama who has no worldly wisdom now into a capable young man when I bring him back to you. After this job is done, I will take him to Mithila. There Rama will participate in the contest being held by King Janaka and break Siva's bow. You will get a daughter-in-law who's like a *goddess of fortune*!"

Dasaratha smiled through his tearful eyes.

Viswamitra walked ahead, blessing everyone.

Rama, without a look at his friends, with bowed head, followed his teacher. Lakshmana followed Rama in friendship.[13]

★ ★ ★

Rama and Lakshmana were walking with Viswamitra along the banks of the Sarayu River. The river flowed along the banks captivatingly with the splendour of trees. The forest was amazing with huge trees never seen before and freely wandering animals. The brothers had become closer to each other, having left the townships, and their kin far away and having come into this starkness of nature. Chatting with each other, cautioning each other, enjoying the sights of strange coloured birds, and the brightness of flowers, they chatted with redoubled affection. "Look! That parrot looks like the one we have! How beautiful that *myna* is! How cute the young deer is! Look at those green flowers, we have never seen them before!"

From the moment of their departure, Viswamitra kept narrating heroic deeds of the Kshatriyas of the earlier generations to Rama. He narrated how which king had won which battle, which king had vanquished how many enemies and which king had ruled over how vast a kingdom.

Rama didn't find much interest in these stories. He was immersed in seeing the reflection of the blue sky in the river, bunches of flowers with different colours blossoming on the banks of the river, and birds flying about and making melodious sounds.

Viswamitra started describing Dasaratha's heroism also. "Rama! Lord Brahma has to come down to describe the grandeur with which your father performed the horse sacrifice." As Viswamitra began his description, both the brothers turned their faces toward the teacher and started listening him eagerly, forgetting their worship of nature.

"Your father began the sacrificial rites with

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13. In response to this episode, we should not question, 'Why should he take such young boys to kill Rakshasa?' In this story, Rakshasas are a myth. Young boys killing Rakshasas is also a myth. The two myths are congruous. According to this story, the purpose of Rama's incarnation was to kill Rakshasas. This task begins from Rama's young age. Whereas in the stories of Krishna, an infant child killed Rakshasas. In the stories of '*The Poisonous Tree*', all are human beings. The incidents in the story occur among those human beings. ★

elaborate arrangements after the horse — which was let loose on the provinces — returned a few months later."

Rama had a doubt right away! "Revered teacher! Didn't anyone capture the horse let loose on the provinces? Were there no heroes in the neighbouring kingdoms?", he questioned politely.

Viswamitra smiling a little said, "Not because there were no heroes, my boy! That is the norm of friendship! When a king lets off a ritual horse, the others allow it safe passage, considering it a virtuous deed. Since no one captured the horse and challenged the king to a war, the king got the fame as someone who has conquered many provinces."

Rama asked in surprise, "How can fame achieved in this manner be great fame, Revered Teacher?"

Viswamitra looked hard at Rama and rebuked him, "These are the norms laid out by the great sages in the Vedas in ancient times. Till today all the people accept these norms as a great boon but they don't question them. Don't you remember the command your father gave you? Can you argue with your elders?"

Rama mortified, looked down and said, "Pardon me, Great Teacher!"

"That's all right. You are still a boy. In future you'll learn fear and devotion for elders", Viswamitra pardoned Rama and resumed the description of the sacrificial rites that came to a halt in the beginning itself. "Rama! Listen attentively! It took a whole year for your father to make arrangements for the sacrificial rites. Kings and emperors came from many kingdoms to attend the sacrifice. Great ascetics left the forests and came in droves. The best of Brahmins came with groups of their disciples from far and wide. All the rites were performed without a hitch under the guidance of the great sage Rishyasringa. Priests officiating at the rites, sacrificed hundreds of ritual cattle and sent them heavenwards. Sages and Brahmins found salvation after eating the meat cooked on the holy fire. Rama! As stated in the scriptures, the sun, moon and other gods were immensely pleased, came down to the ritual site, accepted the offerings and went back. Your father…"

"Did the sun and moon also come to the ritual site?" Rama interrupted in astonishment, defying his fear of the teacher.

Viswamitra hesitated and said, "How does it matter if they don't really come in person? They are there in the sky, in heaven! Rama! At the ritual site, some Brahmins are designated as Indra, Surya (the Sun) and Chandra (the Moon) and given the offerings meant for these gods to please them. Didn't your mother in any worship pray to you after designating you as little Ganapathi?"

Rama remembered the religious vows and obligations that had taken place in the harem and said with satisfaction, "Yes."

"It was wrong to question the elders' words with such doubts, Rama! Why don't you understand… Now listen. After the sacrifice, your father gave away the entire kingdom to priests who had officiated at the sacrifice. Just as laid out in the scriptures, the priests were greatly impressed by the king's humility and said, "O King! Why do we, who spend our life with simplicity in the forests constantly studying the Vedas, need land? You are the one fit to rule. But in its lieu give us money." Your father, with great humility, pleased them by giving them tons of gold, silver, grain, well-fed cattle and beautiful women".

"Why do sages who always live in forests studying Vedas need gold, silver, grain and beautiful women, Great Teacher?", Rama's inner thought was eager to ask. But he silently looked at Lakshmana, trying to communicate with his eyes, and followed the teacher.

Again Viswamitra said, "Every year, all the kings perform hundreds of sacrifices and please the Brahmins and the gods. Rama! Are you listening? Look there, it's going to be dusk. The riverbank here is clean. Wash your hands and feet and come here. I will teach you two spells called 'Bala' (strength) and 'Atibala' (super-strength)!' Viswamitra stopped and stood under a huge tree on the bank.

Rama looked at Lakshmana, asking him to join him also.

"Not to him. I will teach you alone," the great teacher said.[14]

Rama was a little surprised. He stood there staring at the river. In their city of Ayodhya, whether it was archery, scriptures, grammar or Vedic chanting, weren't they teaching all the brothers equally? Isn't education something that everyone was eligible to learn? Rama looked at the disappointed Lakshmana affectionately and asked Viswamitra fearlessly, but humbly, "Are all those lessons prohibited for Lakshmana, Great Teacher?"

Viswamitra said impatiently, "Yes, they are prohibited for him. He is ineligible to learn them," He looked harshly.

"He is after all my brother?"

"May be so. But there is more of godliness in you. He has very little. If you want to know why, I'll explain to you. Understand diligently. When your father performed the sacrifice to beget children, all the gods visited your father. All of them confabulated on how to kill Ravana who was a threat to the world. Under the auspices of Brahma, they prayed to Lord Vishnu to take human birth and be born as the eldest son of Dasaratha. Lord Vishnu agreed to that, consoled them that he would be born as Rama, and disappeared."

Rama listened with great surprise.

"After that Vishnu sent his godliness in *Paayasam* through a spirit into the sacred fire to reach your father. Your father took the *Paayasam* with great delight to your mothers. First, he divided it into two parts, gave one portion to your mother, Kausalya." Viswamitra gave the details of the distribution of that *Paayasam*. "That is why, you have half of the divinity of Lord Vishnu, Lakshmana is 'a half-quarter and half', Satrughna is 'a half-quarter and half' and Bharata just 'a half quarter'. Rama, have you understood? You must receive all the education. The good of the world must be achieved only through you. You are the one born to vanquish the impossible Rakshasas like Ravana," thus Viswamitra described the 'truths and untruths', with a smile.

Rama looked at himself in astonishment. He looked at Lakshmana who was standing mortified with his head down. Rama, for the first time, understood his superiority at that moment. Rama, who realised his superiority, felt saddened that his father had not given the entire pudding to his mother and made him a completely divine, equal to Lord Vishnu.

To Lakshmana, who found out the mystery of his birth and his inferiority Viswamitra said, "Lakshmana! Have you also understood the difference between you and Sri Rama? Servitude to Rama alone is your wealth! Your life must be dedicated to his service!"

Lakshmana humbly paid his obeisance to the teacher and the brother and said, "It is my great Fortune!" He said this, just as his father would say to the priests.

Rama laid down his bow and arrows under a tree, stepped into the river and washed his hands and feet. Viswamitra took Rama behind a tree and taught him the spells and described their miraculous powers, "Rama! Owing to this spell you will never suffer bodily ailments.. You will become a hero who can conquer all the worlds, you will be skilled in logic and counter-logic and wise. With your own wisdom you will be able to take major decisions."

Overwhelmed by the joy that he alone learnt all the skills, which would bestow all miraculous power on any one who learns those spells, Rama came out from behind the tree chanting the spells to himself. Rama turned away his face serenely when Lakshmana tried to smile at him.

Vasista resumed, "Rama! I have many more weapons with me. I have weapons that can capture the enemy in a battle and bring them by force. Weapons that can bring all the gods under one's control. Have weapons that can draw away all the power from others and exhaust them. Gradually, I'll give everything to you".

These words pleased Rama greatly.

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[14] **Bala kanda, sarga 22, Slokas 12 & 14:** Viswamitra tells these spells to Rama alone. He does not address Lakshmana. "Rama! Learn this chain of spells Bala and Atibala. Owing to the power of these spells, there won't be any one who will be equal to you". ★

On that moonlit night, all three rested on the beds of dry leaves under a great tree.

In that milky ocean of moonlight blossomed in the forest, birds in their nests, animals in the bushes, insects all round the earth, aquatic creatures in the water — all wallowed ecstatically in the comfort of nature.

Viswamitra narrated many stories about devotion to Vishnu. He told him about the lakhs of monkeys and bears that were born after the birth of Rama to assist him in killing Ravana. He narrated stories of all the gods and sages who begot children piously through their hearts and souls. Piously, Indra got Vali, Surya (Sun) got Sugriva, Vayu (God of wind) got Hanuman, Brihaspati got Taruna only to help Rama. Brahma yawned and begot Jambavan. Viswamitra told many stories of many more gods and Demigods who begot offspring piously by sneezing, coughing and scratching their backs. He narrated the instance of Dakshaprajapati's daughters giving birth to many weapons only to destroy the Rakshasas. He concluded that all the weapons in his possession are the very same ones and they are waiting to serve Rama".[15]

Rama listened to his teacher's words with devotion and diligence. He didn't find any story unnatural. He did not question any history. His heart went into ecstasies as he was listening to more and more about the devotion to gods, the miracles, the boons, the curses, and those other worldly things. Having attained divinity, and lost the ability to think rationally, Rama stopped thinking and proceeded to go to sleep.

Lakshmana began to think in various ways as soon as he lay down to sleep. 'My brother does not find time to talk to me, being busy talking to the Great Teacher. There seems no part in the royal mission for me in this project of killing the Rakshasas. Back home there are so many friends. I can learn any skill equally with Bharata and Satrughna. My mother speaks to me so lovingly. The maidservants at every step look after me lovingly. Leaving all that love and comfort there, I have come here. Here there is so much indifference for me! If I wish to go back to Ayodhya, the great teacher may send me back along with some travellers going that way. But serving Lord Vishnu... the good fortune of serving him... all the heavenly comforts earned by devotees of Vishnu in many stories... father's command... teacher's command — unable to decide anything, Lakshmana felt helpless and fell to a sleep.

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All the three got up to the sounds of chirping birds early in the morning and bathed in the cool river. Rama and Lakshmana chanted the prayer *Gayatri*, paid obeisance to the Sun, prostrated before the teacher and resumed their journey.

After a while they came across a hermitage near the place where the Sarayu River joins the Ganges. There, sages sat in groups and were enjoying the chanting of the Vedas.

Rama asked Viswamitra, "Divine Teacher! Whose is this sacred hermitage? Why is this place important?"

Viswamitra was very pleased. "This is thirst for knowledge, Rama!" He explained the fame of the hermitage. "This is Rudra's hermitage. All these sages are the disciples of Rudra. In the past, Rudra performed penance here for some time. Parvati fell in love with Rudra and suffered the pangs of separation. Stupid Manmadha, the cupid, thought he could help her. He tried to wake Rudra up from his penance by casting a spell on him. "Rudra, why do you need this penance! Look at the beauty of this spring! Cuckoos are singing all around ... peacocks decorate every branch ... the forest is filled with this new spirit ... look at the rosy glow of nature in the sunset, awash with fresh fragrance of flowers! Look at the beauty of your beloved that is enhanced with her longing for

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15. Why do they need all those weapons? For the sake of wars! Attacking and killing enemies! Occupying their lands! That is justice! Valour! Where there are no wars, we find sacrifices and rituals and killing animals and human beings! That is piety!

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you! Look at the playful youth of your mate that is disappointed by your indifference! Rudra! Stop your penance and fulfil the wishes of your beloved on this perfumed moonlit night," Manmatha prattled. Rudra, disturbed by Manmatha's words in the midst of nature's splendour, opened his third eye and burnt the mischievous one to ashes. Rama! In this way, at this hermitage, Manmadha was destroyed by his own misadventure" Unmindful of the inappropriateness of Rudra's actions, Viswamitra described the hermitage's claim to fame.

What one attains by defying and overcoming many obstacles, and severe tests through mental power is penance. Unshaken by the hurdles of Manmadha, Rudra could have proved how great his power of self-control to all the worlds was. He could have been indebted to Manmadha for giving him such an opportunity. While not doing this, Rudra expected that no one should try to weaken his self-restraint, and expected to attain fame by doing penance in the calm created by others. Just as his teacher who narrated this story has not understood the point, Rama too has not understood the wickedness of Rudra who ignorantly cursed Manmadha who is much loved by the world.

The teacher resumed his narration. "Rama! This Manmadha, though he has no body as such, cannot be intelligent. Once he dragged even a versatile sage like me into lust and disturbed my penance. Menaka cohabited with me and gave birth to a child. It's only then that I could get out of the magic spell of this Manmadha. I left the woman who stood trembling before me, and proceeded to find another place to resume my sacred penance. She returned to her world."

"What about the infant?" Rama asked hesitantly.

"Why ask about the child, knowing that Menaka is not my lawful wife? What responsibility do I have in bringing up the child of a prostitute? Rama, you are too young to know the finer points of virtue.[16]

Listen to another episode of Manmatha's magic. When I was in deep penance elsewhere, Rambha came to disrupt my concentration on Indra's orders. She was extraordinarily beautiful. She was tarrying indolently on flower gardens like Madalasa, a beautiful nymph. I severely restrained myself when my body was tingling with desire for the woman. I calmed down after cursing her to turn into stone. The relief from this curse was to occur many years later when by the grace of a great Brahmin she could come alive again", paused Viswamitra.

"Why did you curse Rambha, O great teacher? She had come on the orders of Indra, hadn't she? Servants always act according to the command of their masters, don't they?" Rama was about to ask but suddenly stopped.

Viswamitra, who knew how it would benefit those who had sent Rambha to disrupt his penance, still showed off his powers on a helpless servant. Indra, while not considering the punishment Rambha suffered as an insult to him, did not do anything with his valour to

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16. In the actual story, reference to Menaka is not made in this context. It will be made in Sarga 63, when we proceed further. I have shifted Menaka's reference from there to here. Because, here there is a mention of Rudra concerning Manmadha, the cupid. A sage, on another occasion, tells Rama that Manmadha disturbed the penance of Viswamitra. As I shifted that story to this context, I mentioned about Menaka here. These sages always run after women and throw their misdeeds on to Manmadha. Even when there is a reference to Menaka (in sarga 63), we do not find a reference to Menaka giving birth to Sakuntala. We read the story in other books that when Sakuntala was a child, her parents (Menaka and Viswamitra) abandoned her. But, as the story of Menaka and Viswamitra is mentioned in *Ramayana*, I have also mentioned about Sakuntala here. Because the young Rama should know the fact that Viswamitra had abandoned that child. As he was still young, he was responding in fair manner to some issues. Practice of giving birth to children and throwing them near trees or ant hills has been there since a long time. ★

save her from the curse and abandoned her. Rama's mind was endlessly confused, went blank and made him devoid of thought. He listlessly followed the teacher.

Meanwhile, all the sages surrounded Viswamitra, welcoming him with reverence. Later, all of them expressed their sadness, "Great Sage Viswamitra! We are unable to withstand with the menace of the Rakshasas. When we do penance with our eyes closed, they suddenly come down and disperse us saying 'what's this penance without doing anything but eating?' The other day they carried a sage up the mountain and rolled him down. They dug a pit and buried another sage up to his neck in it. They sheared the moustaches and beards of another, gave him an axe and made him chop wood. Viswamitra! What is this injustice? Have we ever heard of such things before? We've come to the decision that we cannot but leave this ashram." They lamented. All the sages were *singing the same tune*.

Viswamitra, feeling distressed, said, "Don't worry. The time has come for overcoming our difficulties. You all know that Lord Vishnu has been born as Lord Rama to destroy the Rakshasas. We have set forth on the same task. You need not leave this place and go to any other place." Viswamitra reassured all the sages in many ways [17]

'All the sages paid obeisance to Rama. Sang the sagas of Vishnu's deeds. Rama went into ecstasy on hearing the praise of Vishnu. The purpose of his birth clearly dawned on him all over again. The urge to kill the Rakshasas and to appease the sufferings of the holy sages arose in him.

Lakshmana also found in himself a determination to cooperate as much as he could in the task of killing the Rakshasas, which his brother was going to undertake.

Later, Viswamitra, Rama and Lakshmana crossed the Ganges in the boat which the sages provided, and entered a dense forest.

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That forest was very terrifying. There were no other travellers there. No path along which one can go on foot. The entire ground was full of thorny bushes, and the buzz of insects. The branches of the trees were densely intertwined , not allowing even sun light to pass through. The cries of wild animals were heard in close proximity. There was a variety of snakes hanging from the branches dropping down suddenly and crawling about swiftly. Some birds, with knife-like beaks and claws were ready to pounce to attack, fearless of the arrows. Wild boars and elephants were wandering about freely.

Lakshmana regretted his not having gone home.

Looking frightened, Rama asked, "Divine Teacher! Why is this forest so terrifying?"

Viswamitra looked around sharply, as he moved forward swiftly and said, "Rama! At one time this entire area was a beautiful place, full of hermitages, penance and prayers. After some time, a very powerful Rakshasa named "Tataka" came here with her band of Rakshasas and made this place uninhabitable. That's why this place is known as *Tatakavanam,* the forest of Tataka.

"How did a woman acquire so much strength, Divine Teacher?"

"Because of Brahma's boon to a Yaksha (demi-god), she was born to him with such strength. Brahma's deeds are always like that", Viswamitra expressed his disgust.

Rama asked with natural curiosity, "How did a Yaksha woman become a woman-Rakshasa, Divine Teacher?"

"The great sage Agastya killed Tataka's husband, Sunda."

"Why?"

"Rama! You must not ask 'why' of any deed that has been done by a great sage. Great

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17. As 'new people' are entering the land in which Rakshasas have been living for a long time, Rakshasas are making attempts to drive them away. They attack them suddenly and wage wars. This fact has been turned into something else at the hands of the poet who advocates the other side. He makes it as a story of Rakshasas, who are wickedly torturing sages who have come to perform penance peacefully!

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sages always act for the welfare of the world. Ever since Sunda was killed, Tataka and her son Maricha began harassing Agastya. They would come to the hermitage every day and abuse the sage and go away. Unable to bear the trouble, the great sage cursed the mother and son to turn into Rakshasas. From then on, she has troubled sages in the vicinity with a band of Rakshasas. These places have become uninhabited forests.

Rama listened silently. Rama, who had attained only half divinity still had humanity remaining in him, felt that the Tataka episode was somewhat unjust. Not only was her husband killed, she and her son had also been cursed! Once they were turned into Rakshasas, what was their fault if they behaved inhumanly?

Viswamitra cautioned them, severely scouring the surroundings – "Rama! Tataka wanders around in these areas. She attacks like lightning. Be alert and move about carefully".

Rama looked around eagerly to see if he could catch a glimpse of Tataka. Walking briskly, Viswamitra kept narrating about the deceptions of the Rakshasas.

Rama's mind was immersed in Tataka's history. Since childhood Rama had heard stories of many heroes and devoted wives from his mother, aunts and nurses. Those heroes fought bravely uncaring for their own lives. The devoted wives perform miracles for the welfare of their husbands and for the lives of their husbands. They stopped the Sun in his orbit. They stopped the moon in his orbit. They imprisoned the wind. They drained the oceans of all the water.. For the welfare of just their husbands, they did terrifying deeds that could harm all living beings. Yet the gods were not annoyed with them. They did not curse them. They would visit those devoted wives rushing, wailing. They would touch the feet of these devout wives in salutation and give them the boons they asked for. They give them wealth and riches as reward. The world will sing the praises of these women. Whenever he listened to these stories, he wanted to become a great hero and wanted his wife to be a wife devoted to him.

Wasn't this Tataka also a great devoted wife? What was the crime she had committed? Was it unjust to feel vengeful towards the enemy who killed her husband? Was cursing her just? Rama found these points of justice and injustice and the finer points of the law confusing and perplexing. The disciple, who was *half Lord Vishnu* had no courage to question the teacher and clear his doubts".

Viswamitra did not even look at Lakshmana, or talking to him.

"Rama! Let us hasten! Vamana's hermitage is somewhere nearby. I will tell you of its fame, listen. The emperor Bali, a Rakshasa king defeated Indra and occupied the kingdom of the gods. Lord Vishnu, who always sided with the gods, took birth as Vamana in this hermitage in order to crush the Rakshasa-king. Learning that the emperor Bali was giving whatever was asked for while performing a great sacrificial rite, Vamana went there disguised as a Brahmin and asked for just three steps of land as alms. The Emperor Bali's teacher suspected Vamana to be an impostor and warned the emperor. Even then, the stupid fellow, overwhelmed by the aura of Vamana readied to give the alms. Immediately, Vamana enlarged his body to cover the entire earth and the sky, put one foot step which covered the entire earth, another occupying the entire sky! "Bali! Where are you going to give me the third foot step?", he asked with a smile.

The Emperor Bali, understood that his end is near, thinking it was the greatest of good fortunes to perish under the foot of Lord Vishnu, bowed his head and said, "Divine One! Place it on my head!" Vamana with great enthusiasm, put his mountainous foot on the head of Emperor Bali and crushed him into the nether worlds, handed over the kingdom of gods to Indra once again and went back to his paradise, *Vaikuntha*. Rama! Have you heard? Because I am a devotee of Vishnu, I live in this hermitage of Vamana. Look over there, you can see it behind those palm trees."

Viswamitra walked on briskly with enthusiasm.

Rama, who was still worrying about Tataka's story, found Bali's story also unjust. Don't the sages sing praises to Indra's heroism? If heroism is praiseworthy, what is wrong in the Emperor Bali being victorious over Indra with heroism and occupying god's kingdom? Why does Lord Vishnu hate the Rakshasas? He is the saviour of those who worship him! Why was he keen to destroy Emperor Bali who was his devotee? He was unable to confront him and defeat him directly, is it a matter of celebration to deceive and back-stab someone who has courageously offered alms? Is it justifiable to hand over the kingdom of gods once again to the incompetent Indra? What are these subtleties of law? He hoped there were no latent secret truths in these! Who will clear his doubts?

A doubt arose in Lakshmana's mind as well, "When Vamana put his foot all over the earth, where were Emperor Bali and his kin? Did they crawl on to his foot and sit there? — Sorry! — Must not doubt irreverently the words spoken by elders." Lakshmana turned away and *slapped his cheeks in remorse* for such doubts.

All the three entered Viswamitra's hermitage. The wide variety of fruit and flowering trees surrounding the hermitage were swaying in the breeze enchantingly. An ascetic was driving away, with stones, the chirping birds pecking and feasting on the fruits. A few sages in the distance saw Viswamitra, came towards him and saluted him.

They lauded Viswamitra for successfully accomplishing the task he had set forth on of bringing Rama with him. "Viswamitra! We were expecting you to surely arrive today and were awaiting you. We have communicated the news of the sacrificial rites you are going to perform to the people of the neighbouring villages. All will contribute money and grain by tonight. The ascetics from other hermitages will arrive tonight. You can start the rites without any delay and hurdle tomorrow," they described the arrangements made so far.

Viswamitra was very delighted and said, "Rama! Come here! Sit comfortable on this platform." He called Rama and made him sit down. Lakshmana also sat down on a step below the platform with his head bent.

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The very next day, Viswamitra began the sacrifice. Varieties of grain arrived from the neighbouring villages by the cartloads. Several rich householders offered money. Milk, curds (yoghurt), ghee (clear butter) and vegetables came by the yoke loads. Sages and Brahmins came in group after group as if the earth was *littering*. Though afraid of the Rakshasas, some came because Viswamitra would otherwise be angry, some came so that they could see the funny spectacle of Rama killing Rakshasas, some came in the hope of getting money or grain or a good meal. They all arrived before sunrise.

The efforts toward the rite went on briskly. The officiating priests began chanting mantras, standing around the dais of the sacrifice. The *leaping tongues of the sacred fire* were burning bright with the ghee. Rama and Lakshmana bearing their bows and arrows were guarding the vast open area surrounding the hermitage, away from the sages. The sacrificial rites went on without interruption till dusk.

"Ramachandra! It is time for the arrival of the Rakshasas. You should be very alert!", all the sages cautioned him.

Eagerness began to build up in Rama. All the images of Rakshasas heard about in childhood in tales began to conjure up in his eyes. It was now war with those Rakshasas who pounce to attack, laughing hideously, with their ugly bodies, potbellies, sharp knife-like nails and canine teeth!

Rama looked at Lakshmana with fear and doubt.

Touched by Rama's gracious looks at him after such a long time, Lakshmana went into ecstasy and saluted him.

"Lakshmana! Aren't you eager to see Tataka?"

"Yes, respected brother! You should conquer her."

Both their eyes began to scour the entire sky. The clouds and hillocks turned red. The leaves on trees were glistening. Birds were flying around noisily. The sunset was unfolding as a feast for the eyes.

As Rama moved around alertly, a long flourish of a conch could be heard in the distance. The sages who were immersed in philosophical debates sitting under leafy canopies, rushed into the hermitages in utter confusion, stepping on each other's toes.

Rama stood bravely with his bow and

arrow ready.

Far in the distance, under the trees a woman was walking courageously towards them.

"Tataka! Tataka!", the sages terribly trembled.

Rama stood immobile looking at Tataka in amazement.

She had no characteristics whatsoever of Rakshasas. She appeared like a tribal woman who roamed in the forests always. A person who was as tall as an upraised arm! Ruffled hair, a coloured sari tied with a knot, Knives round her waist, with determined and indescribable glow in her eyes.

Tataka saw Rama and Lakshmana from a distance. She guessed the strategy of the sages. She realised that it was Viswamitra's tactic that she would not consider these youngsters, still not fully out of childhood as adversaries and taking advantage of this, Rama's arrow would kill her. She approached the stunned Rama with a smile.

Rama looked at her in astonishment.

"O Lads! Who are you? You have come walking into this harsh forest on your delicate feet? What royal mission are you fulfilling here — you who are still in the glow of childhood, endearing as little babies? Why do you need these bows and arrows when you should be free to play and enjoy yourselves? Why should you guard these hermitages? Have all the elders become incapable and cowards and are using you for this terrible deed like cowards?" saying angrily, she looked at them with compassion.

Rama, looking at Tataka from top to toe with curiosity, asked, "Why do you obstruct these Vedic rites? Why do you heartlessly harass these ascetics who are devoted to penance?"

Tataka looked mockingly at the hermitages. She looked at the sacred fire with sarcasm. "Aren't these Vedic rites selfish rites, which allow only Brahmins to exploit the entire wealth that belongs to mankind. Aren't these foolish rites consigning to fire the nine kinds of grain, delicious foods, ghee and curds that not only humans but other living creatures would like to eat? Aren't these lowly rites that not only kill hundreds of animals but also turn humans into sacrificial cattle, Lad! Aren't these great devotees of penance heartless people who fill their arms with gold and grain in the name of alms – the wealth which the rulers accumulated by sucking the blood of the poor, by never caring for the welfare of the illiterate people, by terrorising the rulers with sin and virtue, illusion of heaven and hell?

Are these ignoramuses — those who have created inequalities among humanity by dividing people on the basis of rigid foolishness of four-caste system; those who have assigned privileges, luxuries, morals, heavens for themselves and remained blind to nature and the search for truth in nature — *endowed with the wealth of penance?* These despicable ones who all their lives fail to overcome anger and lust, enjoy women and abandon them; these cruel ones who sire children and discard them; the greedy ones who sell their own progeny as sacrificial cattle; these arrogant ones who curse innocent people in their pride of having done penance; these ones who damage all living creatures without any forgiveness, kindness, peace and patience — Are these over-angry persons great sages, royal sages and Brahmana sages?

Shutting their eyes to the beauty of the world, closing their nose to nature's splendour – with head down, and feet up, up-turning the norms of the world, catapulting like clowns, tearing their vocal chords out to shout their ugly primal sounds into space for years together — can these wasted lives who have run away from concerns of social good ever stand for the welfare of the world? They are enemies of the people.

Lad! These people do not seek the wealth either of spiritual penance or fame beyond this world. They seek endless selfishness. They thirst for the authority of dictating the course of human history according to their will. Don't seek Vedanta in scriptures which are partial in nature! Seek Vedanta in the faces of people and their flesh and blood! Seek virtue not in ignorant theoretical discourses but in the practices of daily life!

Have you stood here armed to protect these lowly inhuman people who make fun of us as Rakshasas — for the aim of our fight is to oppose mindless Vedic rites and defeat these devious sages in order to achieve enlightenment, truth and the welfare of all human beings," Tataka paused for a while and looked at Rama with a smile.

Stunned by the accusations against sages which he had never heard before, Rama became hesitant and bent his head down and asked as a child would question its mother, "If these rites are not performed, how will the gods be pleased?" He looked surprised.

"Gods are none but the sun, the moon and other natural forces. Can they have any relationship with the happiness or hardships of people? ……Why are you surprised? Even according to your sages, who are these gods? What will they gain by these rites? Have you thought of this? In the view of these sages, gods are also of their ilk. The sages think that gods too expect their share in the riches and wealth just as they do. These gods are worshipped by name in these rituals and rites. But those gods do not come to the place of worship and receive offerings. The sages get major share of this wealth and grain in the name of the gods. Why do we need this useless eagerness to please such gods? Why don't you please all the people right before your eyes in this vast world?"

"Rama! What is this atheistic discussion with her?" Viswamitra became furious and roared from behind, "She's a Rakshasa. She's the despicable one who tortures the sages and Brahmins and destroys sacred rites. Kill her." He ordered.

Tataka disappeared like lightning into the trees and began pelting stones at the hermitages. The terrified sages running helter skelter screamed : "Rama! Kill her! Kill her! Save us."

Rama imagined what killing Tataka would be like and trembled at the thought. How could I Kill a woman? A woman who had spoken such truth! In childhood, when he once hit a maid servant out of naughtiness, his mother rebuked him in great sadness, "My dear boy! Can you hit a woman? Are you showing all your bravery on women?" From then on his mother's word had become scriptural truth for him. And now was he expected to kill this woman without any reason?

Viswamitra said harshly, "Rama! Why are you hesitating? Do not hesitate to kill her since is a woman. To protect the people, a king has to do any thing: however cruel it may be or whatever unpopularity it may get him. Look at these great sages and the best among Brahmins who are terrified of Rakshasas. Who else do you think are the people? **Are the ignorant ones** — who do not have the right to learn the scriptures, the ones who cannot get to *the lowest stair of heaven* even after a thousand rebirths, who live in stupidity and in the mud and sweat like lowly insects — **the people?** Isn't it the miracle of these Vedic rites that dictate nature? It makes the sun shine and bring rain to the earth; makes fields grow; won't it bring on the deluge if these rites are not protected? Won't the worlds be wiped out? Rama! Do not delay. Hold up your bow. The sun has disappeared completely. The darkness is descending from all corners. Rakshasas are night rovers. They are very familiar with these trees, shrubs and hills. We cannot defeat them at night. Recite the 'Atibala' mantra and release the arrow." Viswamitra hastened Rama.[18]

Involuntarily Rama braced the bow and stood up.

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18. In the actual story, we don't find Tataka conversing with Rama. But he has some doubts regarding Tataka. "Who is Tataka? How did she get the strength of a thousand elephants?", Rama asks Viswamitra. Further, Viswamitra repeatedly asks Rama to kill Tataka quickly, "Don't hesitate that she is a woman! Give up kindness and compassion! In the past, great valorous men have also killed women! Tataka is a wicked woman! Don't be kind to her!" thus he cautions Rama repeatedly. This means that Rama hesitated to throw arrows at Tataka and was somewhat kind to her. Therefore, Rama conversed with Tataka in my story. He asked her some questions. ★

The manner in which Tataka smiled in kindness, spoke her words lovingly, her devotion to her husband, her wealth of knowledge, her concern for the welfare of the entire mankind — every thing appeared before his eyes momentarily. At that moment Rama felt he should turn the bow to target Viswamitra instead. But, he stood helplessly due to the mental slavery of having worshiped the feet of sages for generations that had seeped into every pore of his being.

The darkness enveloped the whole forest. The rain of rocks from behind the trees towards the hermitages increased. Viswamitra realised that Maricha and Subahu had also entered the fray. Some of the sages ran around the hermitages, screaming, "We are dead! We are dead!" intoning the cry like a Vedic chant. Some crowded into the hermitage to hide. Even in the moment of danger, none had the courage to pick up a bow and arrow.

Unable to bear the carelessness of Rama, Viswamitra roared with anger and looked at Rama, "Rama! Have you defied your father's orders? Have you given up commitment to obey your father? How will you become a king and rule your kingdom, if you do not do what the priests and teachers tell you? Have you, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, forgotten that you are born to destroy the Rakshasas? Rama! Do not neglect your duty. Let the arrow go."

Rama had not displayed the traits of wisdom or skill in logic by learning *Bala* and *Atibala* skills. He had not developed the ability to decide about his own actions himself. He let the arrow go dispassionately. He shot some more arrows intensely in quick succession.

One arrow hit Tataka in her heart. Some hit her hands and feet. Tataka collapsed like a tree cut from the base and died.

Lakshmana shot a few more arrows at the dead Tataka and put to good use his 'a half quarter and half' share of godliness by cutting off her nose and ears.

Maricha and Subahu continued to fight Rama for some time. Subahu died. Maricha stopped fighting and disappeared for the moment.

The sages danced with joy. The sacrifice went off without any hurdle.

All the sages gathered round Rama and lauded him in a thousand voices. "The sacred work of vanquishing the Rakshasas, for which Lord Vishnu is born as Lord Rama has begun. May all be well ... May all be well ...."

"Rama! I shall give you several weapons right away!" Viswamitra announced with unbounded happiness.

"Lord Rama alone can bring about the welfare of the world, can please the gods. He is the capable one! He is the deserving one!"

"Rama! You have become worthy of worship for us!"

"Lord Rama! Ordinary people cannot understand your deeds."

Having experienced so much adulation, the distress at his first unjust deed in killing Tataka blew away from Rama's heart. He turned towards the sages with a smile.[19] ★

[Translation: Text - **C.Padmaja.**
Footnotes - B.R.Bapuji]

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19. Bala kanda, sarga 26: In Valmiki *Ramayana*, the killing of Tataka takes place in 'Tatakavanam'. After that sacrifice at Viswamitra's hermitages begins. The sacrificial rites last seven days. On the fifth day Rama fought with Maricha and Subahu. During the ritual period Viswamitra observed silence not in Tataka vana but at his hermitage. The change I have made : the encounter with Tataka occurred during the period of sacrifice. Viswamitra was made to break his silence to allow him to say what he told Rama in the Tatakavanam for killing Tataka. This merely changes the venue but does not do injustice to the story.

'As that Rakshasa was showering rocks, Lord Rama chopped of its arms…Lakshmana cut off the nose and ears of Tataka who had her arms cut off and was exhausted. During the times of kings, cruel punishments such as cutting off noses and ears, chopping of hands and legs were prevalent. Those cruelties became valorous and holy activities in '*Ramayana*'. ★

Link-1

Between the 1st Story and the 2nd Story

[The **1st** story ends with Rama killing Tataka. The **2nd** story commences with the incident of Dasaratha intending to crown Rama. Here we see that part of the *Ramayana* story that lies between these two stories in brief. This is the link between those two stories. The comments in brackets and footnotes are mine.

In this link, Viswamitra narrated many stories to young Rama. He said that he had heard them from his elders. There are many miracles like longevity of thousands of years, meditations for thousands of years, boons and curses in these stories. These miracles are to be grasped from the view point of 'Nature' and 'Society'.

For example 'cursing' means abusing and reviling. Granting a boon means blessing and benediction. Whatever happens among people in society takes the form of miracles in mythological stories.]

Viswamitra's sacrificial offering was over. All the sages, while leaving, said, "The king of Mithila is performing a great sacrifice (Yaga). We are all going there. If Rama comes there he can see the great bow of Siva."

Viswamitra felt happy on hearing that news and he too started for Mithila along with the sages accompanied by Rama and Lakshmana.

On the way Rama asked at a place, "What is the name of this country? What is its history?" Viswamitra began to narrate, "Rama! Listen to the story which I have heard from my elders." He went on like this: Once upon a time there was a king named Kusanabha. He had a hundred daughters. When they were sauntering in a garden the god of wind (Vayudeva) saw them. He said that he would take all of them to the abode of gods marrying them all. The king's daughters rebuked the god of wind in anger, "We will take the hand of the one to whom our father gives us in marriage and we can not be independent. Why do you insult us and our father, you wicked fellow?" (*Only the mention of father, no mention of mother!*)

The god of wind became angry, entered their bodies forcibly and made all of them hunch backed. The king learnt about this and consoled his daughters. "It is great to forgive the wealthy gods. Endurance alone is important for you." So consoling them, he began searching for bride grooms.[20]

In the kingdom of Kusanabha a sage named 'Chuli' was doing penance for Brahma's grace. A Gandharva woman called 'Somada' served that sage. He was pleased with her service and offered her a boon. "I don't have husband. I am not a wife to anybody. I want to have a son with the power of your meditation," she said. *Chuli* produced a son with his mental will power.[21]

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20. From the expression, "Forgiving wealthy gods" we have to infer the meaning that the actions of the rich and powerful are not crimes. All rights are for the wealthy! ★

21. Only from incidents such as these the various stages of history are known. This story reflects the social stage where a woman can procreate children through any man. "Producing a son with the power of meditation is a garb donned by literature. The actual fact was Somada had a child by Chuli. We have to also understand here is that such children had 'good status' in the society of those days. ★

That son was King Brahmadatta. Kusanabha gave his daughters in marriage to Brahmadatta. Their hump disappeared.

"After the departure of his daughters Kusanabha performed a sacrifice for begetting a son. Then his old father told him, "My boy! You will beget Gadhi." So was born Gadhi. That Gadhi is my father (Father of Viswamitra). My elder sister is Satyavati. Her husband is a sage named Ruchika. She was so virtuous a lady that she reached heaven corporeally. Not only that, she is flowing in the form of the Kausika River. That is the history of this place" said Viswamitra.

Rama felt happy, he being freed of doubts.

All of them rested there for the night and the following day walked for some distance and reached the Ganges.

"What is the account of this river?" Rama asked with humility.

"There was a mountain named Himavanta. His wife was Manorama. She was the daughter of the mountain Meru. They had two daughters called Ganga and Parvati (Uma). Parvati did fierce meditation. Her father gave her in marriage to Rudra who did fiercer meditation.

Rudra began copulating with Parvati. Hundreds of years rolled by in that stage. All gods were afraid that Parvati might conceive a powerful Rakshasa owing to such a long-period of copulation. All of them went to Rudra and said, "If you release your semen the worlds cannot withstand that vigour. So contain it within you."[22]

Rudra consented to that and left his semen on the earth. Gods fearing that the earth would split as soon as the semen of Rudra fell on it, prayed to the Lord of Fire (Agni). Agni burnt up that semen. It turned into a white mountain. Then a forest sprang on it. From it was born Shanmukha with six heads. Parvati got angry at the action of the gods and cursed them. "You have obstructed the birth of the child from my womb. You have separated my relation with Rudra. So your wives will also not conceive." She also cursed the Earth — "Oh! Earth, you wicked! You have made me childless. You will never be happy with your children. You will become a wife to many kinds of kings". Without blaming her husband Rudra, she went away for meditation along with him.

Having listened the story till then, Rama felt very happy and asked enthusiastically, "I want to hear the story of Ganga in detail."

Viswamitra began again — "Now I'll narrate the account of Ganga, listen. Gods approached Himavanta and prayed to him, "Ganga must not flow as she likes. She should flow in three ways." Himavanta was pleased and gave Ganga to gods. Ganga went to the abode of gods.

Once upon a time gods went to Brahma and said, "Our commander is doing penance. So appoint a new one." Brahma said, "Parvati cursed the gods to be childless, didn't she? So the god of fire will beget a son not by his wife, but by Ganga." (*This refers to the time that even if a man and woman who are not wife and husband beget children!*)

The gods felt happy and prayed to Agni to beget a child. Agni went to the Ganges River and said, "Oh! Lady! You have to conceive through me. The gods pray so." Then the Ganges came to him in the form of a woman. She conceived. Feeling distress, she said, "Agni! I am unable to bear this pregnancy, heavy with your vigour." Agni said, "Take this foetus and keep it on a mountain. Ganga, took out the foetus from the current of the river, placed it on the mountain which became white, when Agni had burnt the semen of Rudra earlier. Some drops from that pregnancy had spilt on the earth and metals like gold, silver, copper and zinc had came into existence as a consequence. A child was born out of that pregnancy.

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22. Now it is detestable to find all gods standing before a husband and wife in such a situation. In the period of Savagery, the copulation of human beings used to take place as openly as the mating of animals and birds. Mr. Tapi Dharmarao's book "Why are there obscene images on Temples?" mentions these open copulations with substantial evidence. Long mating was the story which humans created to actualize an unfulfilled desire through their imagination. ★

That child had six faces. Gods gave the child to the Krittika stars for rearing. The breasts of the stars sprouted milk. The child sucked the milk with six faces and became Kartikeya. The child drank for a day, grew up and defeated the armies of Rakshasas. The gods felt happy and made him their commander. Kartikeya is Kumara Swamy, he is Skandha. People devoted to him reach heaven of Skandha," so completed Viswamitra the story and Rama felt very happy.

"Rama! I shall narrate how Ganga descended to the earth, listen," commenced Viswamitra again — "Once upon a time there was a king named Sagara. As he did not have children, he meditated for a hundred years. The sage Bhrigu appeared before him (*Brahma might have sent this gentleman, as he himself was very busy*). The sage granted him two boons. The king's elder wife would beget a son who would advance the dynasty and the second wife would have sixty thousand sons. All felt happy. After some time the elder wife gave birth to Asamanjasa. The second wife gave birth to a globe, the size of a big ball. It split and sixty thousand children were born out of it. The maids keeping all of them in pots of ghee reared them. All of them lived to come of age. Sagara's elder wife's son turned out to be extremely wicked. He used to revel in killing infants by drowning them in rivers. (*This is the effect of the sage's boon that this son would bring fame to the family!*). The king banished him out of his kingdom for being wicked. This wicked fellow had a son also by name Amsavanta. He was very good.

Once king Sagara began performing the 'horse sacrifice' (*Aswamedhayaga*). Indra came in disguise as a Rakshasa and stole the horse.[23]

Sagara asked his sixty thousand sons to go in search of the horse. The sons of Sagara searched the entire earth. They made way into the bottom of the nether world but the horse was not found. They returned to their father and told him of their failure to find the horse. He was angry and commanded them to search again. This time they searched the earth digging still deeper. There they saw the great elephants bearing the earth on all the four corners. Earth-quakes come when the elephants shake their heads for relief...." Viswamitra paused his narration for a while.

Rama felt very happy on learning the cause for earthquakes.

Viswamitra commenced again. "Sagara's sons went ahead further and saw sage Kapila and the sacrificial horse grazing near him. They became furious and abused the sage, "You wicked fellow! You stole our horse, didn't you?" The sage Kapila roared with burning eyes. All the sons of Sagara became ashes. On finding his sons had not returned even after a long time, Sagara called Amsumanta, his grand son, "You get the horse. My sacrifice is incomplete" and sent him. Amsumanta too went to that place and on learning about the end of his uncles, searched for water to offer a water oblation. There was no water to be found. Then Garuda appeared. "If you offer oblation with the waters of the Ganges, they will reach heaven," so saying gave the horse back. (*What happened to Sage Kapila? Where had Indra gone? How did this Garuda get the horse? People with such doubts are ignoramuses? They do not find answers*). Amsumanta took the horse and gave it to his grand father. Sagara felt happy to complete the sacrifice. The king went to heaven after ruling for thirty thousand years. (*What a strong wish of ruling for thirty thousand years!*)

Later on Amsumanta became the king. After ruling for some years, he abdicated the kingdom to his son Dilip and went to the forests. He did penance to get the Ganga for thirty two thousand years, and went to the heaven without getting the Ganga.

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23. Why did Indra come in the guise of a Rakshasa? To create the impression that some Rakshasa had stolen the horse! The sages raised a hue and cry that Rakshasas spoil the sacrifices, but you can count how many sacrifices, penances Indra had spoiled and how many infanticides and deceit he had carried out! The essence of the matter here is, stealing horse and cattle of other tribes.★

Dilip also failed to get the Ganga for the redemption of his great uncles. His son Bhagiratha meditated for a thousand years. Brahma was pleased and appeared before him. On learning the purpose of Bhagiratha's meditation, he said, "Siva alone can bear Ganga. Pray to Siva." Bhagiratha stood on his great toe meditating for a year praying to Siva. (*To appear as if that time is precisely measured, the poet says, 'one year'.*)

Siva appeared before him along with Parvati and on learning what the matter was said, "All right, I shall bear the Ganga." (*Bhagiratha could have meditated for Ganga who was actually required. But they do not meditate for goddesses*). Ganga came down with a terrible force from the land of the gods thinking, "I shall flow down drowning Siva also in my celerity" and landed in the matted locks of Siva. Siva sensing the impudence of Ganga made his locks thick. Ganga got jammed in the locks and began to whirl. She could not fall to the earth even though many years went by. Not finding the Ganga, Bhagiratha meditated for Siva again. Siva was pleased and released Ganga. On falling down on the earth, the Ganga split into seven branches and one branch followed Bhagiratha in the tracks of his chariot in its turns and twists. On the way, at a place, Sage Jahnu was performing a sacrifice. Ganga entered the hermitage threateningly. The sage got angry and swallowed Ganga completely. All the gods prayed to the sage Jahnu to release the Ganga. The sage was pleased and let the Ganga out through his ears. So the Ganga became sage Jahnu's daughter, Jahnavi.

Later on, the Ganga went along with Bhagiratha to the netherworld and wetted the heaps of the ashes of Sagara's sons. All of them reached heaven. The Ganga joined her husband, the sea. Bhagiratha went to heaven after ruling for many thousands of years. Rama! Those who hear about the greatness of the Ganga will attain riches, fame, longevity, piety and heaven," concluded Viswamitra.

Rama felt happy on learning about the story of the Ganga. The night passed. At day break they ferried across the Ganga. On the other bank a town 'Visala' was seen. "Great Teacher, the stories you narrate give me great pleasure. What is the history of Visala?" Rama asked.

Viswamitra began. "Long ago sage Kashyapa had two wives named Diti and Aditi. Both the wives' sons thought of getting nectar that would prevent senility and diseases. They started churning *the sea of milk* using the snake Vasuki as the rope and Mandara the mountain as the churning stick. As they churned in that way for a thousand years, Vasuki disgorged terrible poison and hit the nearby stones with his fangs. The stones began to burn the world fiercely. The gods prayed to Siva. Siva and Vishnu, both appeared. Vishnu said to Siva, "Rudra! You are the first among the gods. The first thing that comes out during this effort belongs to you. Take it." Then he disappeared. Siva gulped the poison which the snake disgorged and he went away. Again they churned the sea. The churning stick plunged into the nether world. The gods were afraid and again prayed to Vishnu to lift the stick. Vishnu took the shape of a big tortoise and reached the bottom of the sea and lifted the mountain on his back. The same Vishnu stood amidst the gods and churned the sea. In that churning the sea for one more thousand years, came out Dhanvantari with the ascetic's earthen pot and stick, and sixty crore heavenly damsels. Millions of maid servants too came out along with the damsels. (*The implication is that some people are born slaves!*) Then Sura (liquor) came in the form of a woman.

Diti's sons did not take it. Aditi's sons took it. (*Those who drank this liquor became Suras, that is gods and those who did not drink it became Asuras, that is Rakshasas. So drunkards are gods and the others are Rakshasas! What would Mr. Mahatma Gandhi say?*)

Then came out of the milk ocean *Kaustubha* gem and *Amrita,* the nectar. A quarrel ensued between the gods and Rakshasas (the sons of Aditi and Diti). Vishnu appeared in the form of a woman Mohini, and snatched away that nectar. The eldest son of Aditi, Indra, overcame the Rakshasas with the strength of the gods. Diti lamenting that all her sons had died, told her husband, "Your second wife's sons have killed my children. I shall do penance to beget a son who will kill Indra. Grant me the permission!" Her husband fondling her belly said, "You will be blessed. Be chaste for a thousand years. Then you will beget a son by my grace" and went away for meditation. Diti too felt happy and went away for meditation in another direction. (*Both of them not going in the same direction! Then how would a son be born even after a thousand years?*)

Indra on learning that Diti was doing penance and to dissuade her from that attempt and gain her grace began offering her his services. Diti being pleased, said, "I shall see that there will be no threat to you from my children". In that way when it was short of ten years for a thousand years, (*Oh! What an accurate calculation!*) Diti, once, went asleep with her head on her feet. Indra felt happy that she was polluted by the touch of hair of her feet. He entered her womb through her vagina and began chopping up her foetus. The infant in the womb began to cry. Diti woke up on hearing the cry. "Don't cry, don't cry," Indra warned the infant and continued chopping. Diti asked Indra not to kill the infant. Indra honoring the mother's word came out, having completed his job. (*Every body should learn from Indra how to respect a mother*). Coming out and bowing to Diti, Indra said, "Your hair touched your feet. You are polluted. That is why I have done this," he said. Diti regretted and admitted her lapse, "Yes, I was careless, it is no fault of yours."[24]

She said, "All the pieces of infants in my womb will become gods." Later Diti and Indra both went to heaven.

See, here in this place did Indra serve Diti!

Now a king named Sumati rules this country," said Viswamitra recounting the glory of that place.

Learning that Viswamitra was in that place, Sumati came there, made enquiries about his well being and provided hospitality. Spending that night there, they reached Mithila the following day.

There, a sage's hermitage was seen deserted. "How is it that this hermitage is so deserted?" asked Rama. Viswamitra commenced again, "This is sage Gautama's hermitage. His wife was Ahalya.

Once Indra came in the guise of Gautama and said, "Ahalya, you are charming. I want you." Ahalya, knowing fully well that he was Indra, gladly agreed to mate with him. After that, she told him "Indra! I am happy. Get away quickly. There is need to protect you and myself too!" She cautioned Indra. When Indra was about to leave, Gautama returned and seeing Indra, he understood the whole thing and cursed him "May your testicles fall off!" Indra's testicles fell to the ground. Indra left. Gautama cursed his wife also, "May you turn into dust and wander about without food or water invisibly, till Dasaratha's son Rama comes this way (*By then Rama was not born even!*) and when the dust of his feet touches, you will reach me after getting rid of your lust and flirtatiousness." So saying he went away for meditation.

Indra called all the sages, "get me new testicles" he said. The sages went to a place of sacrifice, "Give him the testicles of a goat. From now on even if you offer the sacrifice of a goat without testicles you will benefit" said they, changing the rule. (*Society reverses the rules for the wealthy*) Indra felt happy to have the testicles of a goat. (*Can children who grow up listening to these stories be more intelligent than Rama?*)

"Rama, find Ahalya and redeem her from the curse, save her" said Viswamitra entering the hermitage. Rama pleased at his divinity, saw Ahalya who was invisible in the form of smoke in the air, in the hermitage. She appeared before all, released of the curse. Rama and Lakshmana bowed at the feet of Ahalya. Then Gautama also came. He worshipped Rama and went away for meditation along with Ahalya. (*We see in this story that even though a husband punished his wife for having a relationship with*

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24. Nowhere is it found that Indra, the chief of gods, is at fault. In all the stories, his crimes are attributed to the conduct of others.

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another man, accepted her again.)[25]

After that, Viswamitra, Rama and the sages went to the place of sacrifice of king Janaka where there was the chanting of the Vedas, crowds of Brahmins, crowded cottages.

On learning that Viswamitra had arrived, Janaka approached him with his *purohit* (priest) Satananda. Satananda was Ahalya's son. He asked, "Viswamitra! Have you told Rama the fate of my mother? Has she been released of the curse and has she worshipped Rama?" On hearing all that had happened, he felt happy.

Janaka greeted Viswamitra. Hearing the virtuous action of Rama killing Tataka, he felt glad that Rama had come for breaking the bow of Siva.

Satananda told Rama, "Rama! Viswamitra will do a great deal of good to you. I shall narrate his history. Listen!" He commenced to tell the story of Viswamitra. "Viswamitra is the son of Gadhi. He ruled the kingdom for thousands of years. Once Viswamitra had gone to the hermitage of Vasista during his peregrination round the earth.

Many sages were present in that place. Some of them did not eat or drink anything but lived by breathing air alone. Some took only water . Some ate only the ripe and dry leaves that fall on the ground. Some were Valakhilyas born at the tail of Brahma! (*Tail for Brahma!*) Some were Vaikhanasas born out of the nails of Brahma! Such a great hermitage was that of Vasista! Vasista was glad to see Viswamitra and asked him. "Oh! King! Have you defeated your enemies? Do your servants obey you? Are your armies, treasures and friends well?" So making enquiries about his welfare, he said, "You are an emperor. If a hospitable reception is to be given, it should be given to kings. Please receive my hospitality." Though Viswamitra expressed his reluctance, Vasista insisted. *Kamadhenu,* which was with Vasista, got everything ready instantly.[26]

After receiving the hospitality Viswamitra said, "Brahmrshi! Why do you need this Kamadhenu? Precious things should belong to kings. Give it to me!" Vasista refused, Viswamitra offered millions of cows, cart loads of gold and silver and endless treasures. (*We have to understand this as an attempt to buy a cow*). But Vasista did not yield. When all his efforts failed, Viswamitra attempted to take away Kamadhenu by force. (*This is stealing of the cattle!*)

The Kamadhenu produced soldiers from its limbs. A great battle took place. Viswamitra was defeated. Viswamitra's hundred sons died in that battle. Viswamitra felt dejected and handed over his kingdom to his son (*where did this son come from?*) went away for meditation, praying to Rudra. Rudra appeared to him and asked, "What do you want?" (*Does the god not know the desire of his devotee?*) "I want a boon that bestows *'Dhanurveda',* all knowledge connected with bows and arrows," said Viswamitra. "So you get it", said Rudra and disappeared. Viswamitra feeling happy, again went to fight with Vasista and used arrows. Whatever weapons and such like he employed were all in vain. (*How different will be the boons of gods?*) Vasista stood before him with the *Brahmadanda,* the stick of Brahma. Viswamitra could not conquer it. Feeling ashamed he thought, "What is the use of this knowledge of warfare that fails to conquer the Brahma stick? Before the power of Brahma (before the power of Brahmana) the Kshatriya power is inferior. I shall acquire Brahma power." So he went away for meditation again along with his wife and performed meditation for a thousand years. In the meanwhile he begot some sons (*That is why*

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[25] We should not understand Ahalya's behaviour in the sense of adultery of later days. The old ethics changed and chastity came in its place.

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[26] Kamadhenu is a cow that gives milk in abundance. *Kalpavriksha* is a tree that bears fruit in abundance. We have to visualize this as the time when one got yoghourt, butter and ghee from domesticating cattle and got variety of grain and fruit by nurturing trees. Kamadhenu and Kalpavriksha were the story form of the desires of possessing a cow that never went dry and a tree that never withered.

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the meditation might have got prolonged). Then Brahma appeared and said, "Viswamitra! You have become a Rajarshi, the Royal sage." Viswamitra was angry that he had not become a Brahmarshi and so he again performed penance.

There was a king named Trisanku at that time. Wishing to reach heaven corporeally, he called Vasista, "Prepare me for performing a sacrifice to go to heaven with this body." Vasista said, "There is no such sacrifice." Trisanku did not give up. He approached the sons of Vasista. They were very angry, "If you don't give up that attempt when a great purohit like Vasista declined, you will become a *Chandala*, an untouchable," they cursed the king. At once Trisanku turned dark. His body and hair turned stiff. His dress turned into leather, his jewels turned into iron.

The ministers and people accompanying Trisanku ran away. Trisanku in distress went to Viswamitra. Viswamitra heard all that happened and feeling glad that a chance had come for him to do something against Vasista said, "Oh King! I shall dispatch you in this *Chandala* form to heaven." He called his disciples and said, "Go and get all the sages for this sacrifice. If anybody declines, come and tell me what they said". Many sages came, but Vasista and his sons did not come. The disciples told Viswamitra that they heckled them saying, "A Chandala performs the sacrifice and a Kshatriya officiates it! How do the sages and gods attend it ?" Viswamitra flew into a rage. "Those who have abused me will go to hell and eat corpses for 700 births. They will turn into awkward shapes and wander about this earth eating the meat of dogs", he cursed. (*This curse is confusing. Scholars should resolve where they had gone: whether they had gone to hell or they are in this world and what meat they ate.*)

Then Viswamitra commenced the sacrifice. The sages whispered among themselves and were afraid of Viswamitra and did as per his wishes. But no gods came to receive the offerings of the sacrifice. Viswamitra became angry and said to Trisanku, "King! I have a lot of power of meditation in reserve to be able to send you to heaven". While all the people around looked on, Trisanku flew in the sky and went to heaven. There in heaven Indra got angry and threw him down saying, "You Idiot! You do not deserve to be here". Falling down headlong, Trisanku cried, "Viswamitra! Save me! Save me!" Viswamitra from the ground cried furiously and ordered him, "Stay there! Stay there! I shall create a heaven separately for you". So saying he created the seven sages and stars and began creating all that should be there in a heaven. All the gods were afraid and said, "Viswamitra! Stop your attempts. A Chandala does not deserve a heaven." Unwilling to give up his determination, Viswamitra insisted "I have given my word to this king. He must go to the second heaven." The gods reconciled themselves to some extent and consented, "All right! Trisanku will remain in this heaven but with his head down". The sacrifice was over.

After that Viswamitra thought, "I met with a hurdle since I performed penance at this place. (*What if he met with a hurdle for the sake of providing heaven for a Chandala? Why should he think it a hurdle? This means Viswamitra did not like such a situation!*) I shall go in another place". He went to another place and performed a fierce penance.

Also at that time a king called Ambarisha began a fierce sacrifice too. Indra stole the sacrificial animal. The purohits said to the king, "This has happened because of your negligence. It is sinful. In expiation, get a human being for sacrifice and perform the sacrifice"[27]

Ambarisha set out with money and grain and thousands of cows to buy a human being.

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27. In the primitive stage of human history the custom of human sacrifices and cannibalism existed. The remnant of that is this performance of sacrifice of human beings. Since it was Indra who had stolen the sacrificial animal and no crime could be attributed to him, it became the negligence of the king. If the thief had been a Rakshasa, it would not have been called the negligence of the king; it would have been the fault of the Rakshasa! ★

On the way be went to the hermitage of Ruchika, a Brahmarshi. (*Viswamitra's older sister was Satyavati. Her husband too was Ruchika. Were both of them one and the same?*)

Ambarisha said to Ruchika, "Brahmarshi! My sacrifice has a break. You have to give one of your sons as a sacrificial animal." That Brahmarshi said, "I will not give my eldest son at all." (*This gentleman, who is so partial towards his own children, is a great sage who has conquered passion, anger, lust, pride and envy.*) His wife said, "I will not give the last son at all." The middle son, Sunassepa said, "My parents are ready to sell me! Take me with you, King". He consented in distress. The king feeling glad, gave the Brahmarshi money and cows to the latter's satisfaction, taking Sunassepa in to his chariot, set out. On the way Sunassepa saw Viswamitra. When the chariot stopped, Sunassepa fell into Viswamitra's lap and prayed, "I am an orphan without parents. Save me! Ambarisha's sacrifice has to be completed and at the same time I don't wish to die either." Viswamitra promised to save Sunassepa, and called his sons, "This son of a sage should be saved. One of you go as the sacrificial animal and please the gods! Parents beget children only so that they obey their orders. Now you have got the lucky chance of obeying your father. Fulfill my word," he said.

The sons of Viswamitra replied derisively to their father, "Saving others children while sacrificing one's own children is like eating canine flesh foregoing good condiments". They laughed.[28]

Viswamitra became furious. Don't you have the fear of facing the negative consequences of defying a father's command? Don't you understand that obeying a father's word is your *dharma* (duty)? May you live for a thousand years eating canine flesh," he cursed. He said to Sunassepa, "My lad! I shall teach you two 'mantras' (spell). When you are tied to the sacrificial pole chant them. Do not be afraid." He instilled courage in him (*Would it not suffice if that was done earlier?*)

Sunassepa boarded the chariot boldly.

Later, during the sacrifice, chanting the 'mantras' taught to him by Viswamitra, he prayed to Indra. Indra was pleased and granted Sunassepa longevity and the fruits of the sacrifice to Ambarisha.[29]

Viswamitra meditated again for a thousand years more. Brahma came and said, "You have become a sage" (*rishi*). Viswamitra did penance again. Menaka, the divine damsel, was bathing in a river. Viswamitra said to her lustfully, "Divine damsel! Stay here in my hermitage. Cool down the heat of my body". Menaka consented. They spent ten years together. Then again Viswamitra remembered that he needed to do meditation and got angry," the gods have ruined my meditation". He asked frightened Menaka to go away.[30]

He went in another direction and did fierce penance for another thousand years. Brahma appeared saying, "You have not yet overcome your sensuousness" and disappeared.

Viswamitra meditated again standing in fire, the cold and water. Indra was frightened, called Rambha and ordered, "Rambha! Disrupt Viswamitra's meditation and help the gods". (*How the disruption of meditation could help gods is not revealed.*) Rambha said trembling,

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[28] We find in this story a state where defying a father's command and not following it as a dictum of the Veda. But defying father's word and getting punished are also prevalent at this stage. Making sons obedient by force seems to have come at a later stage. ★

[29] If Ruchika of this story is the son of Viswamitra's elder sister, Sunassepa becomes the nephew of Viswamitra. Here we find the maternal uncle taking care of the nephew and the father's negligence to son's safety. ★

[30] **Bala kanda, sarga 63:** The story of Menaka comes in the same scene in which Satananda narrates Viswamitra's history to Rama. I shifted it to Tataka vana. There is no mention of Menaka giving birth to a child in the narration of Menaka's story. ★

"Viswamitra is short tempered. I am afraid he may curse me! Be kind to me." Indra ignored her request and commanded her, "I shall 'coo' from a tree becoming a cuckoo. Manmadha too will also come there. You present yourself attracting. Now go." Rambha was helpless and approached Viswamitra.

Viswamitra perturbed on seeing Rambha's beauty and became furious. "Do you want to defeat me while I am trying to overcome lust and anger? Turn into a stone and stay that way for a thousand years!" he cursed her. "Some Brahmin with the power of meditation will redeem you", he granted her the path of release also.

Rambha turned into a stone. Devendra ran away.

Viswamitra realized that he had not overcome anger yet. "From now on I will stay calm. I will not take food. Nor even exhale. I will dry up my body. Subduing sensuousness, I shall acquire Brahminhood," he decided. (*So subduing sensuousness means sitting in a corner without food and water and becoming thin and devoid of strength! When there is no strength in the body how do anger and lust come? If they are not to occur, one has to conduct oneself justly, and take support from justice.*)

Viswamitra went away in another direction and performed penance for a thousand years. After completing that penance and by the time he was setting ready to eat food, Indra came in the disguise of a Brahmin and asked for food. Viswamitra gave away food. Again a thousand more years he meditated without releasing breath and fumes began to come out of Viswamitra's head. All the worlds were getting destroyed by those fumes. Brahma feared much and said, "Viswamitra! You have attained Brahminhood!"

Viswamitra was pleased and put a condition, "Vasista should accept my Brahminhood". Vasista came and accepted, "All right! You have become Brahmarshi."

"Brahmarshi Viswamitra and Brahmarshi Vasista became friends. Rama! This is the story of Viswamitra", so concluded Satananda (the son of Ahalya).

Janaka was very pleased, "Viswamitra! I am blessed on hearing your story", said he and went away with his purohits.

The following day Viswamitra approached Janaka along with Rama and Lakshmana and said, "These brothers are eager to see the great bow of Siva which you have".

"I shall tell you why this bow of Siva is with me, listen", Janaka commenced. (*They narrate ten long stories even if they get a very small opportunity*). "Long ago when Daksha Prajapati performed a sacrifice he did not offer Rudra a sacrificial share. Rudra became angry and got his bow ready to chop off the gods' heads. The gods were afraid and begged his pardon. Rudra took pity on them and gave them the bow. They kept the bow under the care of a king Devarata. That Devarata was our ancestor. From then on it has been with us. When I was clearing the ground for performing a sacrifice a child came out of the earth. She grew up in our nurturing. She is Sita. Raising the bow of Siva to shoot an arrow is the bride money offered to her. Many kings attempted to do this with a desire to marry Sita. But none could do it. I said that I would offer Sita to none. Getting angry all those kings besieged Mithila and harassed me for a year. My strength weakened. Then I meditated and got the patronage of the gods. They gave me four fold army. As a consequence all my enemies were defeated and they ran away. Now if Rama lifts this bow I shall give him Sita in marriage", so saying he ordered his ministers to get the bow.

Five thousand courageous soldiers dragged on the box, in which the bow was kept, placing it on an eight wheeled cart. Janaka said to Viswamitra, "Viswamitra! This is the bow of Siva, which the great heroes of the three worlds cannot lift. Show it to Rama and Lakshmana".

Viswamitra permitted Rama to see the bow. "Rama! This is the bow of Siva!"

Rama got up, opened the lid of the box and seeing the bow caught hold of it in the middle. He lifted it and pulled the string. The bow broke making a thunderous sound. Except Viswamitra, Janaka, Rama and Lakshmana, the rest of the spectators fainted.

Janaka said, "Viswamitra! I have witnessed the heroism of Rama with my own eyes! This is astonishing and incredible", and felt happy. "I intended to offer Sita's hand to a great warrior. My wish is fulfilled. Sita, thus, becoming Dasaratha's daughter-in-law, will bring fame for 12 generations to the dynasty of Janaka. My ministers will go to Ayodhya and bring King Dasaratha after narrating all this to him. I seek your permission to do so". Viswamitra consented saying, "So be it!"[31]

Janaka's ministers left for Ayodhya. They told Dasaratha the whole incident. Dasaratha said to his ministers, "So you have also heard everything. If you like the wealth of Janaka's good conduct (*if they do not like, then?*) let us set out for Mithila tomorrow itself. Let me know your opinion". All the ministers agreed to it.

Dasaratha reached Mithila along with his four division army. Janaka was pleased and said, "Our family reputation is enhanced with our alliance with the Raghu dynasty. Tomorrow morning, we will have Brahma type of wedding."

Dasaratha agreed to it saying, "People who receive in charity a maid, cow, silver and gold should accept it as per the wishes of the donor, so do as you please."

That night passed pleasantly.

The following day Janaka said to the purohit, "My younger brother Kusadhwaja lives in Sankasyapura. I have to see him," Messengers went there and brought Kusadhwaja. Janaka sent word to Dasaratha.

Dasaratha came to Janaka's place and requested him, "Oh, King! Vasista will recount our lineage. Please, listen".

Vasista began recounting. "Brahma's son was Marichi. Marichi's son was Kasyapa. Kashyapa's son...." So he went on narrating the lineage and at the end said, "Rama and Lakshmana are Dasaratha's sons. You have to offer them your daughters".

Janaka said, "I too shall recount my lineage", so he commenced, "Long ago there was a king named Nimi. His son was Mithi. Mithi's son..." so he went on narrating his lineage. "I am the eldest son of Hrasva Roma. I offer my elder daughter Sita to Rama and second daughter Urmila to Lakshmana," he concluded.

Viswamitra intervening said, "Oh king! Your younger brother has two daughters. I request you to offer them to Bharata and Satrughna." Janaka felt very happy. "May it be so! The will of sages like you will be followed. You sit on my throne, my brother's throne and Dasaratha's throne. Rule as you please in the three kingdoms," he requested.[32]

Dasaratha was pleased and reached his place of stay.

The following day Dasaratha gave hundreds of thousands of cows and treasures to Brahmins as donation in the name of his sons.

The same day Yudhajit, the maternal uncle of Bharata, reaching Mithila said to Dasaratha, "My father king Kekaya wants to see Bharata. When I went to Ayodhya, I learnt that you and your sons came here for marriage. So at once I have come here". (*This means, Bharata's maternal uncle and grandfather were not invited to these weddings.*)

The night passed. Dasaratha reached the place of sacrifice. The marriage rituals began taking place.

Janaka requested Rama, "My daughter Sita will follow you as dutiful companion. Will always be chaste and be attached to you like your own shadow. Please accept her."

"Lakshmana, take the hand of Urmila!

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31. While King Janaka made the decision for the marriage, Rama didn't accept it immediately. He said he had to get his father's permission for it. This fact is not mentioned in this sarga. But Sita mentions this on another occasion when she narrates the glad tidings of her marriage. We will see it at a different place. ★

32. It means that these three kingdoms are donated to purohits and sages. In the name of charity and donation purohits and sages take kingdoms into their hands and again return them to the kings. This is meant for making the kings to behave in obedience and respect towards sages. ★

Bharata receive Mandakini. Satrughna, receive Srutakirti — " he offered all his four daughters in marriage to the four brothers. Then the marriage ceremonies concluded.[33]

The night passed and Viswamitra took leave of all of them and went his way.

Dasaratha also left for Ayodhya. Janaka presented his daughters millions of cows, gave them silk garments and ornaments, gave four fold armies and maids and slaves.

When Dasaratha was on his way to Ayodhya along with his sons, the daughters-in-law and the retinue, the animals and birds cooed loudly. Animals crossed from one side to the other. Seeing that Dasaratha asked Vasista, "Birds signal bad omen and animals signal good. What is the reason for it?" To that Vasista clarified, "This signifies that trouble comes, but vanishes soon"

Then suddenly a heavy wind and darkness enveloped them. Except the sages and kings, all the ordinary people fainted.[34]

Then the ferocious Parasurama appeared. "Parasurama was angry for the killing of his father, avenged it by killing kings. Now does he intend us any harm?" thinking so, sages offered him water oblation. Receiving it and seeing Rama, Parasurama said, "Heard that you have broken the bow of Siva. This is astonishing. To test your valour I have brought another great bow. Now shoot an arrow with it and show me your strength. After that I'll combat with you in a duel". Shuddering with fear, Dasaratha said, "Parasurama, You promised Indra that you would not kill Kshatriyas. Having given up all the earth to Kasyapa you now live in exile in the forests. Now do you want to ruin me? If you kill Rama we shall not survive".

Parasurama ignoring him said, "Rama! Viswakarma has made these two bows. Both are equally strong. The gods gave one to Rudra. The other one to Vishnu. Wishing to know who was superior in strength, the gods approached Brahma. Brahma caused a rift between Vishnu and Rudra. Both of them fought fiercely. With the hoot of Vishnu, Siva froze and yielded. Siva's bow was broken. (*So Rama broke that one which had a break earlier!*). The gods realized that Vishnu was more valorous. They calmed down at the entreaty of gods. Rudra angrily gave away his bow to king Devarata. (*So, that is peace which both of them got!*) Vishnu gave his bow to Ruchika. He gave that to my father. While my father was in meditation, Karta Viryarjan killed my father. Unable to contain my anger I attacked kings twelve times and killed all the kings. I occupied their entire land. Then I performed a sacrifice, gifted all the land to Kasyapa, went way into the forest and did penance. Now I have come here on hearing about you. Now string this bow of Vishnu. I will see how heroic you are!"

Hearing all this out, said Rama, "I have heard about you. You have destroyed completely with out any trace the enemies who killed your father. That is good. But you spoke slightingly of my heroism. I cannot bear it. Now see for yourself my valour". Rama seized the bow and arrow from Parasurama's hand. He pulled the string, put an arrow on it and said, "You are a Brahmin and a relative of Viswamitra. I will not kill you. But my stringed arrow can not go waste. I'll hit the power of your conduct or the power of meditation. Tell me which one to hit". Parasurama drained of his strength and said, "Rama! Kasyapa took all my land and then ordered me, 'You should not live in my kingdom'. From then on I wander in forests. So do not hit my power of my walking. Hit the power of my meditation" (*What if meditation is hit? It could*

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33. "Tomorrow is fixed as auspicious" said Janaka. After that the marriages took place on the third day. So 'tomorrow' means three days! ★

34. For the chirping of birds, cries of animals, whirlwinds and sounds except great sages and kings, the ordinary people like chariot drivers, porters, soldiers, cowherds, bearers of palanquins — such low grade commoners faint! We have to notice how poets have always kept the toiling poor behave in such manner, not the wealthy, privileged and high caste people. ★

be done again!) Rama released the arrow. Parasurama left the place. The darkness disappeared. People came back to their senses. Rama presented the bow of Vishnu to Varuna who came in an invisible form.

Dasaratha reached Ayodhya.

The whole city was decorated. Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaika welcomed the daughters-in-laws to the chambers. The brides presented gifts to Brahmins and lived happily with their husbands.

After some days Dasaratha said to Bharata, "Your maternal uncle had come for you long back. You must go to see your grand father." Bharata set out accompanied by Satrughna.

Rama and Lakshmana were serving their father. Rama conducted himself with humility and obedience. Dasaratha and the Purohits were pleased with Rama's conduct.

Rama spent time happily enjoying the many luxuries with Sita. Rama liked Sita because his father had accepted her as his wife. (*How does the question of father's willingness arise when he broke the bow on the condition f set for marrying Sita?*)

Sita by nature was virtuous. She attended to her husband. In addition to it she was very beautiful. Rama liked Sita for all these reasons. For Sita too the luxurious life with her husband was a happy one. ★

[Translation:

R.Venkateswara Rao]

Here ends 'Bala kanda'
Next begins 'Ayodhya kanda'

Story-2

A Throne at the Mercy of the Sandals

King Dasaratha, who sat on the throne in the meeting hall filled with court priests, ministers, guest kings and Brahmins, looked at Rama with an affectionate smile and said in a voice trembling with old age, "Dear lad Rama, I have decided to crown you king of this vast Kosala empire."

Rama was splendorous, bedecked with diamond studded jewels and gold laced garments. He rose from his seat and bowed in humility. Rama, who, by nature, does not reveal his feelings, restrained the surging tides of happiness, saluted his father with a bow and unexcited look and said, "I will receive with pleasure whatever be the order of Father." Saying thus, he raised his head and looked at the throne. His body tingled with a feeling of sitting on the gem studded throne in the place of his father. Amazement accompanied happiness at the promise of his father. Was it true...What he had heard..."You...crowned...king of the Kosala Empire", he stood silently recalling those words.

Everyone in the assembly hall appeared favourable to the idea and smiled approvingly.

Dasaratha felt relieved of a heavy burden. He was restless for many years with the dilemma of whether to give the empire to Bharata or Rama as his successor. Finally, he declared his decision and felt relieved of the burden.

But, suddenly the past flashed like lightning before him. The heart of His Excellency palpitated. Here, we need to know certain things of the past. Dasaratha, who was unable to father children from his earlier three hundred fifty two wives, had determined to marry the three hundred and fifty third wife. He had been patient, cool and enduring. If she failed to bear forth a child he would marry the three hundred and fifty fourth and then the three hundred and fifty fifth wife, and if he went on marrying patiently either the four hundred and first wife or five hundred and sixth wife or seven hundred and ninth wife would bear…one should not be hasty, should one? If one goes on marrying continually with patience, won't the eight hundred and eighty eighth wife or nine hundred and ninety ninth wife give birth to a male child? If that wife is not blessed with a child…the thousand and the first…The Vedas said, "Patience is your ornament." The elders too advised, "Composure is important." When princesses of different kingdoms are within reach, should an emperor remain childless keeping trust in three hundred fifty three wives only? What a shame? How foolish it is! Thus pondering over again and again and again, the old aged king, who then decided to marry again for the three hundred and fifty third time, took all the necessary care for the beautification of his body, went to a far off country that took a week to reach on fast running horses and began to negotiate with the king Kekaya as all the girls in the neighbouring countries had been married off.

King Kekaya was extremely happy that his daughter had received a proposal from a great emperor. But then thought of his daughter, with a feeling of remorse and told the emperor. "Your Excellency King Dasaratha! You have many wives. My daughter is very pretty and young. What will happen to her progeny?" said he with hesitation and palpitation.

That father had the least doubt as to whether his daughter would bear children if married to this trembling old man! Also, he had no doubt whether his daughter would beget children when three hundred and fifty two wives had not borne children through this great male person! But he had the doubt whether the son whom his daughter would bear got the kingdom or not! That's why he asked about it with so much concern .

The old king had already heard about the charms and beauty of Kaika. Pushed in that strain, "Your Excellency, it has been proved that all my wives are devoted to their husband and virtuous, and there is little chance of anyone begetting children. So I need to be blessed with children from your daughter. After me, my whole empire will come to your grandson, any way, won't? My virtuous wives will never disobey me", said he, stroking his moustache. He forgot about the dye applied to the moustache and regretfully wiped the fingers on the silk pillows at the back of his seat. Pretending to have a beat of great musician relieved the fingers of the dye to some extent.

In the meanwhile king Kekaya regained his composure from his deep reverie and said with amazement, "Who could say, your Excellency? God's deeds are inscrutable? Your other wives too might be blessed with children" and he recounted god's miracles.

Ignoring all those miracles King Dasaratha said with wounded pride, "Even if my other wives beget sons….Will I go back on my promise?" He felt like stroking his moustache again, but refrained at once and began to twist the pillows instead of the moustache. "You talk like one who is not aware of the prestige and fame of our *Ikshvaku* dynasty. Even if the sun rose in the west, or the oceans dried up and nature stood still, this great king Dasaratha will never break his promise. I'll bestow all my empire on the son of Kaika." So saying, he twisted his moustache and got his fingers stained with the dye again.

King Kekaya's doubt was resolved. After completing the formalities, he began the arrangements for the marriage.

Princess Kaika was an embodiment of beauty. She was brave enough to drive chariots in the battle field. Having learnt about the efforts of the bridegroom in keeping himself attractive, the 'handsomeness' of the wrinkles on his cheeks, the dyeing of his moustache and his physical trembling through her maids, Kaikeyi expressed her dissatisfaction of the match in the presence of her mother angrily.

That mother reprimanded her daughter, as all mothers have been doing for thousands of years. "O! My darling madcap, what is old age for men? That too for kings, can there be old age? At the worst, king Dasaratha might be sixty! That is not an age worth worrying about. What if he has many wives? You are the last wife. He will treat you with great fondness. Your fellow wives are childless. Your son alone will inherit the kingdom. What more does a woman need, my darling? Are you not aware of the kind of happiness I am deriving from your father even though he was not old at the time of our marriage?" she heaved a sigh.

Kaika, who knew everything about her parents, reminisced. Her father knew the languages of all animals, birds and living beings. He would feel happy listening to the conversations of ants and mosquitoes, but never had he spoken a single word to his wife with fondness.

Once he listened to a cantankerous conversation of an ant couple. "Why do you look at that red ant fellow?" said the husband ant angrily to the wife. The wife ant looked at the red ant again. "How handsome he is! His complexion, handsomeness, long arms, wide eyes! I cannot resist myself from looking at such a charming personality", said she curtly.

The husband ant was indignant. "You foul wretch! Don't you know it is not fair for virtuous wives to look at other male ants? It seems you are going to destroy the name and fame of our black ant dynasty." He was about to pounce on that ant and bite the wife.

The wife ant got infuriated and looked at her husband ant defiantly. "You earn your *livelihood grit* and I mine. Then what is your authority over me? Then what is this show of temper to me like human beings? Why should I have that menace of virtuousness which dependent wretched human women exhibit? I will not live with a lewd like you since you have insulted me so much. I am going my own way. I do not need your glorious family or you." And the wife ant walked off with the red ant.

Kekaya king heard all this talk and his blood boiled. He felt like crushing that sinful wretch under his foot. But by then that infidel ant slipped into a crack in the wall. As his anger had not subsided, he *clenched his teeth* with anger. "Oh! How polluted the world is!" said he with a feeling of sorrow and bitter smile.

Kaika's mother asked him, "Why are you smiling sorrowfully?"

King Kekaya was about to relate the whole affair but suddenly stopped. Thinking that the arrogant words of the ant would inspire, enlighten and spoil women, he concealed it from his wife. He never ceased the spiteful smile.

Kaika's mother was worried about his health and called in the court physicians.

In spite of the king's protests the physicians tied him down to the bed, poured several cups of yellowish red syrups down his throat, put salves into his eyes, massaged his head and left the king roaring, groaning and walked away with their medical powder kits. With that incident, hatred between the wife and husband touched a new peak. Kaika knew that her father was spending his time with courtesans and had abandoned her mother from then on.[35]

Kaika fell into a reverie with her mother's sigh. "Even if the husband were young, how long would that fascination last in royal fami-

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35. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 35, slokas 16 to 24: When Rama starts for his exile in the forest, Sumantra scolds Kaika, "You too are a wicked woman like your mother" and tells her the story of ants. King Kekaya had the boon to understand the languages of all living beings. Once, he heard an ant called 'Jrumbha' talking under his cot and he laughed a lot. (*How can a single ant talk to itself? It means it talked to another ant. The poet has not mentioned what those words were. Somehow, they must be words which could not be told to his wife!*) Kaika's mother asked him the reason for his laughing. "It cannot be told. If I tell you I will face death", the husband said. "No, you laughed insulting me. That's why you are not telling me", said Kaika's mother. The King got angry, abandoned his wife and sent her away from the kingdom. (*The story of an ant or a mosquito is a pretext to abandon the wife!*)

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lies? Within a month of the marriage he will get a new wife. That is worse than my predicament. If I marry the aged King, I myself may be the last wife. I can be happy with the love of this old husband," thought she. She was married off even before the streak of sadness on her face had passed off.

Since Dasaratha returned to the kingdom with the new young wife, all the remaining wives forgot all their past jealousies and united. They used to assemble in Kausalya's chamber and always talk about Kaika's audacity and haughtiness in various ways. The same talk every day. Even the pet birds of Kausalya muttered in their cages thrusting their beaks out, "Kaika…Kill her..Kaika...Get out…Kaika…bite her leg." All people used to burst into laughter while the birds fondly uttered those sounds which Kausalya's maid servants had taught them. On listening to these mutterings they used to laugh. The maid servants of other queens in the course of their conversation, would ask the servant maids of Kaika shrewdly, "Does your queen keep well? Has she shown any signs of conception?" They would reply angrily "When your queens do not show any such signs how will ours show any?" They would shrug them off.

"She has tied the king to her apron strings, you see"

"If possible let your queens too do the same thing. Why do you *cry foul* at our queen alone?"

"Well, the king is in your hands. You prate as you like"

These bickerings would reach the stage of big quarrels and the queens in the chambers would come to know of them. Again a rapid procession of rustling silk curtains of the palanquins to the chamber of Kausalya! Hubbub in the entire harem of Kausalya! Whisperings in all the rooms. The enactment of servants! Doubts and cheeky comments of the queens. In between laughter, Chirping and muttering of birds! The same kind of passing time till the fresh news was heard!.

While days were passing like this, whether it was Kaika's ill luck or good luck, Kausalya and Sumitra also showed the signs of conception, along with Kaika. All the three gave birth to sons. When those four infants appeared amidst those hundreds of women all their hearts became *oceans of joy* as if cool shower of rain had graced the parched land. Then hatred receded and friendship developed among all. Months and years rolled by peacefully.

Although the four children were of the same age, Rama and Bharata received special recognition. In the harems Rama received respect as the son of the chief queen. Bharata received honour as the would be king. The priests and all the queens knew the promise of Dasaratha.

Lakshmana and Satrughna became shadows of Rama and Bharata respectively without any speciality.

As she was immersed in the fondling by the old king and became lazy to look after her only son, Kaika used to keep the child always with her parents. King Kekaya too was fond of Bharata and kept the boy with him always. Satrughna attended on Bharata always to curry his favour.

Only Rama and Lakshmana grew under the patronage of Dasaratha from their childhood. The entire attention of the father was centred on Rama, who possessed a special character. Right from his childhood Rama was shrewder than the other three. He was clever. He knew how to behave with others. He would show over obedience to his father. He behaved in such a way that his father felt happy, "What fulfillment would I have had without a son like this!" He exhibited over obedience in the presence of Brahmins and priests. They would praise him saying, "There is no noble person who can surpass Rama in all the three worlds."

Rama would treat any woman on whom his father's eyes fell, as his mother. The numbers of such mothers were in hundreds. Rama would show a lot of respect whenever he came across his mother, or other related mothers in the harems. He would bow and salute, "Salutation, Mother!" Everybody was immensely pleased to receive the respects of a grown up son like him and with their eyes moistened they would bless him "Live a thousand years long, my son!"

They would say playfully to fellow queens that "Rama is my son, not Kausalya's."

Rama would dole out alms or throw ceremonial feasts to beggars on propitious and auspicious days according to the astrological calendar. Even if the days were inauspicious and not holy, the hungry beggars would wait with hope with great glee, "When will Rama feed us again! Holyman! When again will he be liberal in arranging a feast! The other day, on a festival day, the generous Rama put a double handful of grain into my bowl."

Rama believed that fame and heaven would grace the king who would donate cows and lands to Brahmins and perform sacrifices. Rama gained the affection from all corners that way.

Just as he watched the moon with wonder in his childhood, he also observed the Scriptures with wonder and questioned them a bit in his childhood. Just as he stopped questioning about moon though he had not come to know any thing new about a moon as he grew in age, that is, just as the moon had become a routine matter, the scriptures and codes too had become a routine matter. Under the tutelage of Viswamitra, the Vedic tenets spread across his nervous system, absorbed into his blood and assimilated into every atom and thus he became a staunch follower of customs.

Although, Dasaratha's hopes and affection were centred on Rama, as the children were growing, he got agitated. How could he pass on the kingdom to Rama, which actually was the right of Bharata. From then on Dasaratha was more willing to keep Bharata with his maternal grand father. He tried to keep Bharata away from gaining a good reputation and friends in his empire.

At some time ago, Rama also learnt vaguely from his mother about his father's promise to king Kekaya. He wondered from that time—what his father would do! Whether he would give it to him or Bharata! He increased his wealth of humility, as he could not do anything else!

King Dasaratha pondered over the issue of inheritance for twenty five years and at last dared to consult his priests. Vasishta who knew about the king's promise to king Kekaya remained silent and indifferent. All those priests who would lose nothing under a new king said to gratify the king, "Do as you please, your Excellency. The son of the chief queen is eligible to get the throne, isn't he?" They supported the king's view. Dasaratha gained more courage. He decided to give the kingdom to Rama and announced the same in the court. Though his father's violation of the promise caused surprise to Rama, it was washed away with the overwhelming joy.

★ ★ ★

Dasaratha called Rama to his private chamber after the announcement of coronation.[36]

"My lad, I have become old", he sighed. After Kaika, he had not married anew for twenty five to thirty years though he had had some clandestine affairs. This made him disinclined to life and he admitted his old age. After admitting and sighing, "What if I have grown old? I have enjoyed all the pleasures not forbidden by *Dharma Sastras*, the scriptures. I have performed hundreds of sacrifices and cleared the debt of Gods. I have contributed to many charities and donations and cleared the debt of Brahmins. I have paid off the debt of the physical body with the gratification of corporeal pleasures. Now I am ready to leave for heaven." He looked at his son with satisfaction. The king who ruled the people did not say a word about what he had done to them.

Rama listened to his father, folded his hands in obedience, bowed his head and back and said. "My respected father, you will surely go to heaven. All our ancestors have gone there, haven't they?" He lowered his eyes to the ground.

"That's true, my son! Now, the point is..." Dasaratha looked around cautiously, lowered the pitch of his tone, shaking his head said, "This coronation should be done very quickly at once. Bharata is in the house of his maternal grand father. So, there is nothing to worry, but it should be carried through as quickly as possible before he comes here. Bharata may be willing to give up this kingdom to you, but it is not safe to trust him. We don't know what kind of hurdles will come in the way if we delay it. Priests say that tomorrow is auspicious. It is better if you are crowned tomorrow. If this news leaks out, you may face danger from the men of Bharata. You must be very cautious and keep your friends and well wishers around." He cautioned him and leaned on to the silk pillow, coughing with agitation.

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[36] **Ayodhya kanda, Sarga 4 :** Here we will know what Dasaratha specifically talked to Rama and what the inner meaning of those words is! ★

Rama was not at all surprised at the words of his father. "Doubting Bharata? Why? Why coronation before the arrival of Bharata? Why suspect only Bharata and not Lakshmana and Satrughna?" — Rama does not have this question. Rama knows pretty well why his father suspected Bharata. If he were unaware of his father's promise, he would have been shocked by his father's words. He would have questioned his father, 'Why did he suspect only Bharata not Lakshmana and Satrughna?" Since he knew every thing as to why he should suspect Bharata, Rama kept silent.

Rama, who knew everything, did not ask his father, "Is this justified? Are you justified to violate the promise that you made? Am I justified in accepting this crown? I cannot agree to this deception."

He did not remind the responsibility to his father who had left the right path, "Don't get ill-fame by violating your promise! Call Bharata and perform his coronation!"

He did not attempt to create confidence in his father about him saying thus, "I will accept Bharata as the king, along with the people. Do not doubt me."

Rama knew pretty well that it would not be prudent to discuss the propriety of such a thing since the fact of Bharata's right over the kingdom was confined to the harems and the public was not aware of it

Rama kept quiet bending his head in obedience and listened to his father's words as if he was concerned with the matter. As if it was his duty to follow his father's instructions.

"You may leave, my dear boy! Be careful!" said Dasaratha to him and rose tremblingly to go to Kaika's chambers.

"In all humility! I will conduct myself in line with the wish of your Excellency," said Rama saluting with a bow and walked out solemnly. He proceeded to Kausalya's chambers with joy to convey the happy news to her. The news had reached the chambers already. All the queens were present there. Sita and Lakshmana also were present. The *faces* of all of them were *shining with joy*. Kausalya called in Brahmins, on learning about it, and commenced the worship of the gods. The whole harem reverberated with Vedic chants and the beating of drums.

Rama approached his mother smiling and said obediently, "Mother, father has announced in the court that he will crown me king." He attempted to appear solemn. But, however hard he tried, he could not conceal his pleasure in his eyes and the smile on his lips under that solemnity.

Kausalya was overwhelmed with joy. "Heard about it, my dear. How long it is since I have heard good news!" She heaved a sigh of relief. "Long live, my boy. May all your enemies perish!" She blessed him. "You were born at an auspicious time. You gained the favour of your father with great humility. How I prayed to god and offered worship to see you crowned. How blessed will be Sumitra and I if you are a crowned king. All our kith and kin will be joyful." She looked around with uncontrollable joy.

All the queens stood very eagerly to gain the favour of Kausalya, the would be queen mother. Each was trying to get a chance of speaking to her, each blessed Rama with smiling looks.

Rama turned his head away from the blessings and saw Lakshmana bowing aside. He was more pleased with Lakshmana's modesty than earlier. Rama thought that however docile and humble one might be, one might have a streak of jealousy and hatred in one's heart. Is Lakshmana above jealousy and hatred? To Lakshmana, Rama said with a smile, "Lakshmana! I may be the king nominally, but you are also the king indirectly. Enjoy all these royal luxuries as you please. You'll find nothing wanting in my rule." He looked at Lakshmana solemnly.

Lakshmana was very happy that Rama was becoming the king and not Bharata. Under the rule of Bharata, he would not have any special place. He would have to remain an insignificant person. Under the rule of Rama, his status would be very high. His name and fame would spread widely. Lakshmana felt happy as if he had himself been crowned, as Rama said. He bent his head in humility and said, "Why do I need all these pleasures, respected brother? Your mercy itself is a great gift! Serving you is my treasure," He could not but fall obsequiously at his brother's feet saluting him.

Then Rama turned slightly to Sita and saw her looking important, "Look, you are becoming queen by being my wife?" Just as all the husbands in the world, would look at their wives, who receive recognition only through the estates, status, fame, Rama looked at Sita like those husbands proudly, condescendingly, sportingly, defiantly with all heroism, kingliness and like a husband.

Sita felt shy when her husband looked at her with a downcast glance in the presence of so many mothers-in-law and bowed her head. All the maids in waiting gathered round Sita. "Oh! The young queen is so shy! Speak up a little, madam! Don't go punishing us from tomorrow." They pretended fear and talked playfully with her. Sita hid herself behind her mother-in-law. Kausalya scolded the maids in waiting, saying, "Oh, stop your fun, you silly girls!"

Kausalya's chamber became a sea of joy - with laughter, cries of joys, play, running of maids in waiting, cries of birds - *like the surging sea on a full moon day.*

★ ★ ★

Kaika's chamber plunged into silence. Maids were moving about restlessly. It grew very dark and a lamp here and there was lit. By the time the king would arrive they had completed their work. They prepared the garlands. They prepared lavender for a bath. The rooms were filled with incense. They prepared the eatables for the king. After performing their duties they sat sadly in their usual places.

★ ★ ★

In Kaika's chamber, it was Manthara who first heard the news of Rama's coronation. She was shocked. She was upset, "Is it true?"

Manthara was the servant who considers Kaika her 'life'. She was an aged woman. A long time ago, after the marriage of Kaika, she had come along with Kaika from her parental home. Since then it had been her responsibility to look after the well being of Kaika. As she had been a servant of Kaika right from her childhood, Manthara took liberty with Kaika. Kaika too had full confidence in and love for Manthara.

"Have you heard, lass! Have you heard?" Manthara came to the bed of Kaika with agitation.

"What? Heard, what?"

"You ask me 'what'? Take heart! Get up and start a life in the forest! Your co-wives are going to do the same thing to you!"

"What are you talking, about Manthara! Don't talk like a foul-mouthed woman! What has happened now?"

"Ask your husband! How dare he crown his eldest son? The coronation is tomorrow!"

"For whom? For Rama? Tomorrow? Where did you hear this?"

"I heard it, lass! I came here after enquiring about every thing. What has the king done to the promise he made to your father before your marriage? Has he forgotten the whole thing?"

"Why do you talk with half knowledge Manthara! Keep quiet!"

"Don't dismiss my words! Tell me whether you remember or have you forgotten your husband's promise?"

"Why not? His Excellency is a truthful and an upright man! He won't break his promise! He knows everything!"

"Yes, lass! He knows! But he is doing all this knowingly"

Kaika smiled calmly, "Let him do it! Whether it is for Bharata or Rama, what difference does it make? Both of them are my sons, aren't they?"

"Only two? Aren't there two more? You

have four sons, my lass!"

"Yes! You are right. All are my sons"

"Are you crazy or sensible? Then why did you get this promise from your husband?"

"Did I get it? My father asked for it. The king had agreed. Well, Manthara, he made that promise as the elder sisters did not have children at that time. Now the king has four sons. Sri Rama is the son of the first wife. Let it happen like that! What difference does it make? All are our children"

"Alas! How innocent are you my lass! You are not worried that your husband is breaking his promise! Should he not tell you a word if he wanted to crown the eldest son? In fact, should he not call your father and tell him, "Look, I made that promise to you in the past. But I want to do this. In fact, should he not call your father and your son for this coronation? What a funny thing this is? Coronation of the brother without Bharata?" Manthara *pressed her cheeks* showing her surprise.

Kaika smiled and said, "Don't you think, Sage Viswamitra must have advised the king? Perhaps, tomorrow must be an auspicious day! Perhaps there was no time to invite relatives"

"Stop this talk, my lass! You don't tolerate any slur against your husband so much that *you don't even allow a fly to sit on him.* Is Bharata a relative? Should they have an auspicious ceremony without Bharata? There are always auspicious days. Couldn't they have found another auspicious day?

Kaika smiled and kept quiet. Though she was talking with a smile, Kaika had dissatisfaction toward the behaviour of the husband. 'Why is the king breaking his promise? What has happened to his *satyavrata,* the commitment to truth? If time passes, will the truth also become empty?'

"Well, Manthara! How did Rama agree to this? He does every thing justly, doesn't he? I don't believe it. Rama might not have agreed."

"Very good! You don't give up your craziness! If the main fellow does not agree, why do attempts take place? Can't you understand that both the father and son have colluded? Perhaps, they are confident that none will stop them! Your father is not there! Your elder brother is not there! Your son too is not there! Well, about....? If you look at your husband, you will forget yourself. Then who will stop all this, my lass?"

Kaika said smilingly, "Aren't you there?"

"Yes I am here! Why? *I am not here only for food!* Why did your father send me here along with you? What do you think about it? Did he send me to eat and roam about here or to look after your comforts and hardships? That is why I am yelling like this. Who will stand to lose if you don't pay heed now? Only you! I am here only for your sake! You will see from tomorrow what will happen! You have a fascination for your 'oldest son'! That son will become a king tomorrow. Your oldest co-wife will become Royal mother. Can we bear her pride? Her daughter-in-law will be the queen! Your daughters-in-law, your son, you and every one will have to live like their slaves.

"'Stop, you stupid woman! Stop! What is this talk? Don't we know how noble Sita is? Even the elder sisters? Aren't they like me?

"Yeah, yeah! They are also like you! That's why they always talk scandals about you; is it because they are like you?"

"Stop this talk! Do you think that just because they may have said something in the past?"

"Well, ignore my words! All right, you can open your eyes tomorrow when you face!"

"It's All right, don't worry! I will ask the king, is it All right?"

"At last you have said the right thing. Don't simply ask him, grill him!"

"What is this stupid talk? Have you become such great person to find fault with the King? Hold your tongue!"

"Yes, my lass! My tongue is bad! I am losing my mind as I am worried that you will be in trouble. But you are least bothered *as if no ant has bitten you*!"

"You mad cap! You have understood me so little. What do you know how strange I feel about Rama's attitude?"

In fact he is a real scheming person. It seems he is over enthusiastic to become the king"

"Yeah, yeah! He will become a king! You can see that!"

"I don't know my child! You don't deserve this hardship. You treated all the four sons as your own sons. But they can't see you happy. They are so jealous that they *can't see you with two eyes*"

"Stop talking! I have a severe headache. Go away!"

"Lie down, take rest, my child! I'll send Bala. She will apply the balm"

"No! I don't want anybody! Leave me alone"

"Yes, my child! I am going", Manthara left with tears in her eyes.[37]

In the midst of the sounds of the birds returning to their nests, the king got off his chariot, walked through the spacious rooms, stimulated with the aroma in the air and entered the chamber of Kaika.

The bed decorated with flowers was bare. The old husband's love sickness doubled for he had not found his wife who appeared before him every day at that time, in all splendour like cupid's maid, and fall into his embrace on his arrival. In the absence of these, his love-sickness increased. As directed by the maids he went to the resting chamber through the flower garden.

Kaika, who usually spent dusk walking in the garden, chatting with her maids, was now alone in the room on the bed sunk in a thought. The burning lamp alone was her companion.

Dasaratha sensed that Kaika was deeply saddened. He had got some doubt also. He tried to be brave and went near her. " Kaikeyi! what happened? Here?…You…alone…so lonely…Is anything wrong with your health? No maid has told me anything. Do you have a headache with this incense? Have the petals of flowers poked your body and hurt it? Do your feet ache because of walking in the garden? Whatever has happened, there are many physicians! They will fly here to serve you in no time! Oh! Why don't you tell me how much you are suffering?", said he tremblingly, gasping after walking through the rooms and garden and sat down beside her.

Kaikeyi hardened her heart that was about to melt on seeing him and remained quiet.

Dasaratha's gasping abated. Having

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37. Ayodhya kanda, sargas 7 to 9: There is a mention of Manthara throughout these three sargas. According to Valmiki's description, Manthara is a wicked woman. She is an ugly hunchback. She is the servant who instigated wicked thoughts in Kaika. Manthara had come as a servant from Kaika's parental home. (The poet said, '*jnyaati daasi*'). Manthara's duty was to look after Kaika's welfare. Kaika says about Manthara, 'You wish my good. You assist me.' As Dasaratha is now violating the promise that he made while marrying Kaika, Manthara considered it her duty to caution Kaika about it. This means, Manthara acted as a loyal person to her mistress. Therefore, Manthara must be considered as a noble character and not as a wicked character. Here there is a point concerning way of writing. We find not only men describing women's bodies but women too describe. Kaika describes Manthara's limbs, as follows: "Your breasts are….projected up to the shoulders. ….Your broad hinder part and remarkably full breasts…with your long thighs, you look most charming…."

There is another point here: While talking to Kaika, Manthara says, 'If Rama becomes king all his women enjoy pleasures. Your son and daughter-in-law will be deprived of pleasures! Here, the poet uses the expression, "*raamasya paramaaha striiyaha*", meaning, "Rama's noble women". Concerning 'Rama's women', there is a debate whether Rama had wives other than Sita. This kind of debate appears on three occasions in the story of *Ramayana*. This is the first context. Based on 'Rama's women', it is meaningless to doubt if these women were Rama's wives. 'Rama's noble women' mean Rama's mother and Rama's wife. Other mothers who side Rama are also included. All the royal women who stand by Rama are Rama's noble women. Therefore, it is a meaningless attempt to draw inference that Rama had other wives, from the expression 'Rama's women'. ★

realised that the royal physicians could not break Kaikeyi's reticence, he thought of coaxing, cajoling and winning round his fond wife, mixed amorousness in the smile behind his moustaches and said: "Kaikeyi, why this annoyance? Where are the ornaments that should shine on your nymph-like body? What about the silk sari? Have you ever been angry with me? You used to embrace me with your little hands on my arrival. Why this silence? The king is here to fulfill all your wishes, then why should you be so melancholic and droopy? What has happened to you? Oh! Are you angry that I, your lover, came late? Oh! What can I do? The state affairs…lot of complications …intricacies…" He moved to embrace her with these words.

She moved further away from him. She turned her face harshly.

Dasaratha turned pale. He was worried that it was neither physical ailment nor a romantic anger of his wife. He felt slighted that being such a great king he could not mitigate the anger of one wife. He set right the necklaces round his neck and his moustache, "Kaikeyi, tell me, has any body harassed you? Insulted you? Have you to avenge anybody? Tell me, however innocent that one might be, I will order his execution to please you. Or I will pardon the bitterest criminal if you want it to be so. Or would you like to see a rich man turn into a beggar? Come on, tell me. I'll send my army to loot his riches and granaries and turn him a pauper tonight. If you wish, I'll make the most wretched pauper a rich man. Speak up, Kaikeyi, you are the embodiment of beauty. Can I bear the sight of your being melancholic? There is none else among my wives dearer to me than you now. Being such, how can I live on without fulfilling your desire? My empire is so great that sun won't even set on it. Take whatever you like. Take it all. If you want my life, Take it", he offered literally, with a confidence that Kaika would not demand such a thing. He offered boons *as bountifully as the ripe leaves that drop at the stroke of the wind.* Dasaratha was without parallel in offering boons, which the other side would never ask for. He offered Kaikeyi his life and empire as was his old habit with every new queen every month. But thought to himself, "Why is she so adamant?"

Kaikeyi broke her silence and started talking.

"I have heard that Rama will be crowned king. Is this news true?", said she without mincing words. Dasaratha was embarrassed. He regained his composure and said smilingly, "I have come to convey that good news to you personally. So, you have already heard about it. Don't you feel happy, my dear?…coronation for our Rama." He was about to laugh, but was apprehensive on seeing Kaikeyi's facial expressions.

"When is the crowning ceremony?"

"It's tomorrow!"

"Has his Excellency sent invitations to any one?"

"Invited those kings who could reach here in a night's journey"

"To my father?"

Dasaratha feared and turned his head away…" There is no time, you know"

Kaikeyi looked at him sharply. "You fixed the ceremony with the intention that there shouldn't be any time, didn't you? What prompted your Excellency to decide about the successor to this vast empire so suddenly and so clandestinely in a day?"

The king fidgeted with fear. "These days my physical condition… My health… Auspicious time…. Brahmins"

"Your Excellency! Stop lying. I know pretty well your machination. Though the king has forgotten about the real succession to the throne of Kosala, I haven't. Where did you dump your promise you made at the time of our marriage that my son would be crowned king?"

The king was bewildered and sat silent. The king had never forgotten about his promise. It was his strong belief that Kaika had forgotten it long back. The old king did not even dream that his obedient and dutiful wife would remember a promise made as long as twenty-five years ago and question him now in such an undaunted manner. He just expected that the coronation would pass off unhindered if

Bharata and his grand father were hoodwinked. But...

"Why don't you answer, your Excellency? Is it not unbecoming of a trusted one? Should the promises made get time barred then and there? Should the truths not known to the world become untruths and should they be forgotten?"

"Kaikeyi, you should not be so wrathful. Rama is just like your son, isn't he? Rama is the worthiest and ablest of all, don't you know that? All the laws ordain that the eldest son should inherit the kingdom, don't they?

"Your Excellency, don't the same laws ordain that one should not back out of one's promises? Call those up before whom you made this promise and relate the qualifications of Rama and disqualification of Bharata. Till then I won't allow Rama's coronation."

Never had the king faced such defiance from anyone of his so many hundreds of wives. He got uncontrollably angry "What! You won't allow it? Very good! Who needs your permission? I made the promise not to you. How dare you defy my action?" said he and turned his head away nonchalantly.

Kaikeyi could not suppress her anger which she had controlled till then. She burst out in anger, "Who else had the right to resist your wicked act except me, your Excellency? You have proved yourself how much truth there is in your vow of trust. I'll prove my right in my defiance. Do you remember the incidents when you went to the battlefield in the past and fought against Sambarasura on the side of the gods in the fight between gods and Rakshasas? You fainted in the battle field and I drove the chariot to a secret place. I saved you twice from the enemies. Do you remember it? I hope you have not forgotten that you were very pleased and granted me boons? Do you? Now, do I have the right to demand those boons at least?" said she and looked at him with defiance.

Dasaratha trembled timorously but spoke out with a semblance of seriousness. "King Dasaratha is always ready to grant your boons," he twirled his moustache.

Kaika, with the confidence that she was demanding the fulfillment of her right, said unhesitatingly, "Your Excellency, bring back Bharata at once and crown him. Rama should be exiled to *Dandakaranya* in ascetic garments. I demand these two boons"

Dasaratha looked blankly at her. Had Kaika gone crazy? Or had he heard wrongly? Should the kingdom be passed on to Bharata? Should he send Rama in exile to the forests? What boons are they! Has any woman ever demanded such boons in the world? He was thunderstruck and sat dumbstruck *without any gestures*.

"Well, ask for whatever you want", when Dasaratha had made such offers to his many wives in the past, they used to ask him caressingly, "The diamond merchant is here, can't you get me a diamond necklace?" Or "My near and dear have come. Won't you get them silk saris?" His Excellency would immediately get them either jewels or saris and would look at their faces triumphantly as if he had uplifted them. Dasaratha, who was well versed in the art of fulfilling small and sundry wants, could not imagine that Kaika would exhibit so much audacity and demand such strange boons.

Kaika waited for some time and questioned him, "Your Excellency! Have you granted my boons?" Furiously, with uncontrollable anger, with a sense of desperation that his tricks had failed and rebutted, Dasaratha said, "What boons? You wicked woman! Should I give kingdom to your son? Should I send my son to the forest? You senseless woman! When the whole world is glorifying Rama, how do you even entertain such an evil thought? *With what face* do you demand the exile of Rama an embodiment of virtue? You shameless woman! May you be damned!" He began to abuse her.

Kaika, without any fear said derisively, "Your Excellency Dasaratha! Is it proper to impute to me all your wickedness? Is it treacherous on my part to demand the welfare of my son? Have I asked for the exile of Rama without any reason? Had not Rama cunningly made an attempt to get the throne to which he has no right, would I treat him as an enemy? Will Rama — who is now prepared to sit on the throne to which he has no right — tolerate Bharata ruling tomorrow? If Rama continues to stay here, will not his relatives, friends, and retinue constantly prompt him to turmoil? Am I not aware of the atrocities in Royal families with ambition? Your Excellency, what use will it be to hand over a throne surrounded by an enemy cabal and give that kingdom to my son? What is wrong in my demanding Rama's exile till my son Bharata establishes himself firmly on the throne?" She spoke fearlessly.

Dasaratha looked on dumb struck. A few moments ago, calling his darling son Rama to his secret chamber, Dasaratha had warned him about his safety, "My lad, there will be danger from Bharata's men to you. Be careful in your movements" Now, while Kaika was taking the same safeguards for her son, Dasaratha fell into a situation where he could not do anything except look at Kaikeyi in amazement.

"Your Excellency! If the desire to make Rama had cropped up in your heart you should have truthfully confided in me, 'Kaika! I will not break my promise even today. I too agree that Bharata alone has the right over the kingdom. But, if you too agree, my heart desires to make Rama the king. Yet I will do as you wish since you have the right.' Why didn't you confide what you have in your mind? If you had behaved like a *devotee of truth*, I would have happily agreed for the coronation of Rama. Your Excellency! Neither my father nor I ever told Bharata that he alone had the right over the kingdom. Till today, we are not bothered about it. We were not worried as we believed your commitment to truth. Why didn't you call Bharata and told him, 'My son! I had promised your grand father a long time ago that I would give kingdom to you. But it is my wish that Rama should be the king. I will do so if you agree to it happily.' My father, my son and I would have felt happy for your truthfulness and we would have acted causing happiness to you. You too would have escaped the sin of untruthfulness. But what have you done? You, your son, your priests, all of you have tried to deceive me. I will not let your wickedness continue. Tell me quickly what you have decided now."

Dasaratha understood thoroughly that Kaika would not give up her adamant behaviour.

For a long time, thinking in many ways he felt at last that there was no alternative other than trying to convince Kaika with sweet words. He felt it inevitable to set aside for some time his manliness, kingship and husbandship. In a manner to melt Kaika's heart and spring kindness in her heart, he said, "Kaika, you are a virtuous woman. Is it fair for a virtuous woman to grieve her husband like this? Even if the husband offers boons, is it fair to ask for boons against the will of the husband? The priests have fixed tomorrow as auspicious. All preparations for the coronation are going on. By the dawn all kings will arrive. What shall I tell them? How can I falsify the announcement made in court? If it is behind the screen it is another thing. Kaikeyi, I am an emperor ruling the kingdom for many years with name and fame, I am your husband who *took your hand with fire as witness*. See, I bow at your feet. Save my name. Give up your demands." He bowed his head, trembling in agony.

Moving afar with contempt, Kaika said, "Now I understand how you might have taken back your words given to many women by bowing at their feet, how you have earned so much fame by begging many women and by burying your sins in the bed rooms. Your Excellency! Don't you have sympathy for me that I live a virtuous woman's life by giving an oblation of sesame and water to my youthful enthusiasm by marrying a 60 year old husband. You should gladly fulfill my boons asked for after such a long time!" She said.

Dasaratha's anger erupted again. "Stupid woman! Although you are a woman you argue and reason with your husband? Foolish woman!!" so abusing Kaikeyi in his mind, he gently caressed her saying outwardly, "Kaikeyi, see, how your eyes, beautiful like lotus petals, have reddened. See, how your face which shines like the moon, has faded. You are a greater beauty excelling Rambha and Rati Devi. Your mind is as beautiful as your body." Describing her so, he cursed her in his mind, "Sinful woman! Your beauty is like that of a snake.

Not knowing that you will bring so much infamy to me, I promised you boons unwisely." .Again he said to Kaika, "I know you are very understanding and sensible. You are just testing me, otherwise who else is as virtuous as you? Will you hurt your husband? All right, take away the kingdom for yourself. But give it again to Rama. That will make my boons granted and the Kingdom will be spared for Rama. Both of us get fame and heaven," thus finding short cut to heaven Dasaratha looked gladly at Kaika.

Kaika, who had loved all the while a husband however old he might be, seeing the meanness in that husband, felt ashamed. "Your Excellency, I could never imagine so much meanness even in my dreams. During our marriage, during the war, even now, you have made so many promises to me and not fulfilled any and now you plan to achieve your intention. If it is to give the kingdom to Rama, why should I waste my boons asking you, suffering so many reproaches from you? Your Excellency! Why is there so much secrecy? Why don't you simply say you will not grant the boons that you have promised? Why do you proclaim how abiding you are to truth to the scriptures, the gods and the sages? For myself, I'll not give up my right. I do not want either fame or heaven. I don't wish for a heaven which all the liars of your ilk reach."

Not able to tolerate Kaika's recklessness, Dasaratha's anger surged on crossing boundaries. "You shameless woman! Stupid woman! You argue so fearlessly with your husband, does a spirit possess you? Sinful woman! You seem unafraid either of sin or piousness. Stupid woman! You are no more my wife from this moment. Your son is not my son. Who do you think you are! You or your son are not to perform the obsequies for me after I am gone. Think well. Do you understand how many calamities will follow if I give the kingdom to Bharata and exile Rama to the forests? I will die grieving deeply for my Rama. Except you, all other queens will die for me. Kausalya dies. Sumitra dies. Lakshmana dies. Satrughna dies. Sita dies. All the people in the kingdom die. Animals die. Birds die. Then becoming a widow, you and your son can rule the kingdom without people." Saying so, he tremblingly saw as if he were scorching her with his anger.

Kaika derisively laughed unabashedly. "After Rama's exile, none will die, though in your case I cannot say because you are old with age. Rest assured. In this harem wriggling with false friendship, deceitful strategies, empty flattery, hate and jealousy, do people have love and affection for one another to sacrifice their lives? Will all your queens die for your sake? Which woman did you tie with love so that she would give up her life for you? Since we are virtuous women and since we are helpless women, we live on clinging to you. But why should we have the wretchedness of following you to the other worlds?" saying this Kaika looked at Dasaratha fearlessly, "No need to grieve about all dying. Sita and Lakshmana will be happy where Rama is. Satrughna will be carefree with the friendship of Bharata. About people? Will the changes and deaths of kings sitting somewhere on thrones move the people? Will the family turmoil and internal sorrows of kings touch the people? Will the people shed tears for the kings who never heed their sufferings ? All right, tomorrow you can see if the people die for Rama or live for Bharata. Your Excellency! Why do you have all these useless thoughts? Why don't you decide the present course of action? She again questioned straightaway.

Dasaratha, having nothing to do, helplessly, incompetently, bowing his head while tears welled up in his eyes began to wail, "Oh! Have I to exile a son who is faithful and obedient to me to the forests? Will Rama, who sleeps on swan down beds, sleep on the bare ground with dust and dirt? Will Rama, who used to eat tasty varieties of food, satisfy himself with roots and bulbs? Can I survive even a moment without Rama? Worlds may survive without the sun, but without Rama will not all these countries and lands be burnt to ashes! Lad! Rama! How can I live without you!"

Kaika, unable to bear the outburst, said with contempt, "Why these tears? Is wailing the way to manifest love? If you are so fond of

Rama, stop giving me the boons. I am not going to forcibly haul them from you, if you don't give them to me. You break all the promises! Give up the holy worlds and heavenly pleasures for the sake of your dear son. Be prepared for the sin of falsehood. But who will believe your love except fools, which love pours down a *pot full of tears*, repeats empty flattery and shows empty hands? There is no use, however you bemoan. Decide something by sunrise tomorrow." Saying this, Kaika stopped the discussion and walked out of the room.

King Dasaratha, having tried all the contrivances — like flattery, weaknesses, common blame, infamy for fear of which normally ordinary women yield — before Kaika and having failed miserably, was even more infuriated than before on Kaika going away so defiantly stopping conversation. "May your face be scorched! May your teeth fall out! Sinful woman! You have descended upon us to destroy our lineage, wicked woman! May you be rooted out completely! Better you die. For that matter the whole women folk should die for the better, except those virtuous women who do not cross their husband's will." He resumed abusing her.

In that flood of curses Kaika's rights, Kaika's questions and Kaika's logic were drowned out for some time, but rose again. The king spent a long time cursing her with a helpless swinging, internal trouble, sorrow, anger, trembling, grumbling and groaning.

It was past midnight by then. Dasaratha could recollect only one thing suddenly amidst the unending thought stream. When he was young, while hunting in a forest once, he had heard the sound of gurgling water on the banks of a river and mistaking it for an animal he had killed the son of a sage with an arrow. Since he was not the son of a Brahmin, the sin of killing a Brahmin did not heap on him. But even then, the father of that victim, a Sudra sage, cursed bewailing, "Your Excellency! You too will die of the pangs of separation from your son." "Will the word of a Sudra sage come true?", thinking so he had never worried about the curse. But now Dasaratha felt the fear of that curse being realized.[38]

The entire harem was silent as never before. The surrounding garden was still in darkness. Dasaratha sat down lonely, where not a single word of a man or chirping of a bird was heard. Are the boons to be granted to Kaika? Or are they to be rejected? — He was struggling in a dilemma. If he granted the boons he would have to send Rama to forests. If he did not grant the boons he himself will go to hell. That was frightening even to imagine. How infamous in the three worlds! Ill reputation!

It was Dasaratha's belief that all the ancestral men of the Ikshvaku lineage were enjoying the pleasures of heaven. When all of them were enjoying multiple pleasures in heaven, should he fall in to the pit of hell on the charge of the sin breaking a promise? Should he forsake the great fortune of drinking nectar and the juice of the lips of heavenly courtesans and sitting on a high seat in the court of Lord Indra. Was all this virtue accumulated by the charitable deeds done over the long years and many sacrifices and good deeds to go waste?" "What is this? Why am I thinking like an ignoramus? Who is father? Who is son? All those are earthly bonds. Everybody should seek his own salvation, should one cast off salvation getting entangled in these despicable bonds? Why should I face the blame of breaking a promise in this old age? The Vedas say 'Truth is Brahma, Truth is Dharma, one gets salvation by following the Truth'. So let me do so" — thinking this, Dasaratha saw the sky through the broad window, closed his eyes speculating the pleasures of ascending to heaven.

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[38] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 63, slokas from 14 to the last and also sarga 64, slokas from 1 to 58:** After Rama left for the exile in the forest, Sumantra returned in the chariot and told Dasaratha about Rama's departure. Then Dasaratha wailed and told Kausalya about the curse on him. Once, Dasaratha, much before his marriage to Kausalya, was hunting in a forest. He hit Karana, the son of an ascetic, with an arrow while that boy was collecting water from a river. See what Dasaratha is saying about how Karana spoke to him. "As I was afraid of the consequences of killing a Brahmana, the son of the sage grasped my inner feelings. The son of the ascetic — who was withering away, who was suffering a lot, who was facing lot of pain, who was losing control of his hands and legs and who was struggling with death — gathered courage, bore the agony and said to me thus, ' O King! I am still in my senses. (*Lest the readers think that the boy had lost his senses, the poet is carefully saying that the boy uttered the words while he was still in senses*). O King! Give up the feeling that you will have to face the sin of killing a Brahmana. I am not a Brahmana. Don't wail! I was born to a Vysya man through a Sudra woman'. (*This means, perhaps, all the worry of the son of the ascetic is about Dasaratha's sorrow!*) Dasaratha narrates to Kausalya about the death of that ascetic's son, his parents' agony, the cursing of Dasaratha and so on. 'Cursing' means wishing ill upon the cursed and is often accompanied by abusing. ★

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The day dawned. The garden woke up. The court bards coming with cymbals, lutes, drums sang in praise of the Ikshvaku dynasty, the sacrifices made by the ancestor kings, the name and fame they had acquired and the battles waged and laurels won by king Dasaratha, "Great warrior! King Dasaratha, wake up" said they, singing the matins to awaken the king and left.

Beautiful young courtesans prepared lavender water in golden vessels for bathing the king, got ready the medicines, the king had to take in the morning.

By then Kaika came to Dasaratha and questioned, "Your Excellency! What have you decided?"

Dasaratha bent his head, "I had got entangled in the noose of *Dharma* (duty). I am incapable of taking a decision. Call Rama", he sighed.

Kaika moved away looking derisively at Dasaratha.

Sumantra was the charioteer as well as a minister of Dasaratha. He was an old man familiar with all in the harem. He came to the door of the room where Dasaratha lay, and began as usual, to say the favourite words to Dasaratha, "King Dasaratha, the day has dawned in the east. The Sun is marching with great enthusiasm to see the coronation of Rama. The streets of Ayodhya are all tumultuous. All kinds of grain, material and articles are ready for the coronation. The throne, the hide of tiger, and the altar fire are ready. All the charming courtesans arrived! Hundreds and thousands of cows, silver and gold to give in charity to the Brahmins are ready. Thousands of Brahmins and teachers have arrived. Many kings have brought valuable gifts and are in the rest houses. Traders, wealthy people and eminent people from neighbouring villages have also come for coronation. Your Excellency! The auspicious moment is nearing. Vasishta has sent me here to convey all this to you" he recounted fast.

Kaika listening to all this, unwaveringly ordered Sumantra, "Go at once and call Rama here."

Sumantra did not move, waiting for a word from Dasaratha.

Dasaratha got furious with Sumantra, "Why don't you go? Don't you know that Kaika's order is my order? Go. Call Rama here at once", he roared.

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Rama, waking up in the wee hours, having performed his worship and all, completed adornment, got the chariot ready, awaited a call from his father, talking with friends, expectantly looking at the door that morning.

Lakshmana sensing the intention of his elder brother reached Rama's chamber in the midnight carrying a cart-load of darkness on his head. He had been keeping watch outside the chamber since he reached, for the call from his father.

Among his friends, Rama shone brightly like the moon in the midst of clouds, with the resplendent adornment of his body. Rama had on all the formalities of coronation except the crown. He was bright with glanets. Friends gathering round him, jovially said, "Already you have the glow of a king." Some of them who had foresight were doubting - "Any thing may happen any time. One can not depend till it is over."

At that time Sumantra came and smilingly said, "Rama, father wants you at once in the chamber of Kaika. Come on, come on!" and hastened him.

Rama feeling happy, "To Kaika's chamber? Why there?" asked looking solemnly.

Rama's friends released a torrent of questions "Has not the king started from there yet?"

Without listening to the answer of Sumantra, Rama went inside to Sita. Telling her about the arrival of Sumantra for him, Rama said, "Sita, it seems Kaika likes my coronation.[39] Yes, my step-mother is an excellent woman. Highly virtuous. She never crosses her husband. There will not be any hurdles for my coronation. Definitely this act will be carried through on this auspicious hour. All right, I shall go there," and he went out.

Sita heard doubts which her mother-in-law and husband had expressed now and then about the succession to the kingdom, since the time she had come to her in-laws' place. Now so suddenly her husband's coronation was taking place and she also felt extremely happy and wished that it should go on unhindered and saw her husband off, going up to the main door and stopping at the door, moved aside behind the curtains.

When Rama went out, Lakshmana was there and bowed. The silver chariot was decorated and ready. Rama boarded the chariot and sat in it solemnly. Lakshmana also boarded the chariot and stood behind Rama fanning him. Rama's friends, the kith and kin and the retinue followed the chariot on elephants and horses. The procession started with the music of instruments, the dancing of the courtesans. Brahmins followed chanting Veda hymns. People thronged all along the path, stood there watching the courtesans, horses and elephants.

Bedecked in multifashioned ways, women of wealthy families made all attempts to attract the attention of the would-be king, throwing flowers on the chariot from the tops of high storey buildings. "How fortunate is Sita, becoming the queen consort! Had I been Rama's wife I would have become queen" thought everyone, feeling sorry at not getting Rama as their husband, but for not becoming queen.

Rama sitting solemnly, straining his ears on either side of the path throughout, tried to listen to what people talked about. "Nobody is raising the topic of Bharata's coronation? Not saying that his coronation is unjust?..." However much he tried except for the resonant murmuring sounds, no words of people were heard. Rama knew well that the common ignorant rabble could never comprehend the depths of the state affairs. He also knew that common people would exult at any tiny change in the land and would be happy. Rama saw innocent delight on the faces of many.

"Our prince is a sensible, just and righteous man. We shall feel more comfortable than before under the new emperor's rule", said people with new hopes and some of their words reached the ears of Rama. A smile glowed all over his face. The new king had no time to think about their troubles during the rule of his father and what new comfort he was going to offer them now.

Some of Rama's men joined the crowds here and there and with great enthusiasm were talking as if their view was the view of the people, "It will be enough for us if Rama's coronation goes on smoothly without any hurdles. We do not want other pleasures, not even heaven." They were the people whose pleasures and heaven depended on Rama's coronation.

Rama solemnly asked in a soft tone, with a smile, "Lakshmana, can you hear the words of the people?"

"Yes, respected brother! Your coronation will definitely take place, now it will not stop", Lakshmana submitted humbly.

Rama accompanied by Vedic chants, the

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39. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 16: See how specifically Rama is telling about Kaika to Sita. The fear that Kaika had the right to put hurdle to his coronation reveals itself very clearly in Rama's words.

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music of the instruments, dances and songs, went through in a procession crossing temples, meeting places, gardens and finally reached Kaika's palace. The procession stopped in front of the palace. The whole place was filled with the roaring of elephants, neighs of horses and tumultuous noise of people.

Rama got off the chariot and walked alone to the chamber of his father.

As soon as he saw the scene in his father's room, Rama felt *as if his heart would stop beating*.

His father was still lying on the bed with closed eyes, still with the night dress on. Though the dawn had already broken. Was he suffering from any ailment?

Kaika sat beside him, silently!

Rama bowing obediently to the couch where Dasaratha lay, and after that bowing to the seat obediently where Kaika sat, got up and stood aside with lowered neck, lowered back, folded hands and bowing.

Dasaratha slightly raising his head with eyes full of tears said, "My lad! Rama! Have you come?" With this, turning his head aside as if he could talk no further, he closed his eyes.

Rama was thunder struck at the attitude of his father. Instead of exulting with adornments in colourful ways, father grieved deeply, sighed and trembled. Had anything happened?

Rama looked at Kaika without turning his head. Her face too lacked composure and some change loomed there.

At that moment a doubt cropped up in Rama's mind. "What had happened to father? Has his health been affected suddenly? If it is indisposition, the court physicians should be administering medicines? What could be the reason for his Excellency to be like this? Has that happened which he had suspected from the beginning?"

Rama, saluting to Kaika involuntarily, said, "O Mother! Is my father well? Have I done any wrong without knowing it? Is my father angry with me? Or is there any bad news? Why are both of you so silent? What is the reason?" so talking, he showered questions on her anxiously.

Kaika observing Rama, without delaying said, "My boy, there is nothing wrong with your father's health! He is suffering from a mental weakness. He is entangled in a noose of Duty and is shirking to consult you about it" and she kept silent.

Rama turned pale, looking at his father. "Mental weakness for King Dasaratha! My father has no trust in me? What a misfortune! Does not the world know that Rama obeys his father's word? My father can command me with a look! Mother! Tell me the reason for my father's sorrow. I will carry out your word as the dictum of the Veda. If you want it so I shall jump into fire. If you want it so I'll jump into the sea. If you want it so I'll consume the deadliest of poison," so saying he shook frenziedly.

Kaika observed Rama keenly. Cutting off the affection that had developed for him from his childhood, Kaika said, "You out do your father in throwing out promises. When your father sent for you to come at once, what was the meaning of your coming in a procession throughout the town? Have you set out for coronation, not knowing who the real successor to the Kosala Empire is?" She paused.

Rama stood thunderstruck.

"People say that Rama is a very worthy and righteous man. Knowing that you do not have any right to the throne, how did you prepare to ascend the throne?"

So, it has come true! Kaika questioned harshly. The situation so arose that he had to give some reply. Rama recovered quickly and thought sharply. "Mother! I have no other world than obeying my father's command. I won't question myself whether my father's order is just or unjust. Obeying father's words is my '*vrata,* a self-imposed vow! I always carry out my father's commands", so saying he bowed his head in humility.

"All right! Then, treat this too as your father's command. When your father married me, he promised to give the kingdom to my child. Now I am demanding that right. Even before you were born, your father had granted me two boons gladly during a battle between Rakshasas and gods when I saved him. I am asking for them now."

Rama heard Kaika's words with agitation but was moved. "Rama, you and your father proclaim to the world now how truthful your father is and how obedient you are in carrying out your father's will. My child Bharata should become the king of this vast empire! You should go into exile to the forests of *Dandakaranya* as an ascetic and live there for fourteen years! Wind up the preparations for your coronation, have matted hair, wear the skin of an antelope and set out for forest life immediately."

Rama, thunderstruck, stood like a stone statue and looked at his father helplessly. "What is this horrible thing ?"

Dasaratha hid his face, suddenly invoked cough and turned to the other side and lay quietly. Rama could understand obviously that his father's opinion had changed totally. He stood stunned. All hopes failed, dreams shattered, doubts and fears had come true, the comfortable future that was in sight disappeared and vain life remained — when such a situation arises how sorrowful is a man — how tortuous it is — what anxiety will one face — Rama suffered all that. He felt such anger, that would defy to the hilt the humility and obedience preached by the scriptures, on his father who lay without raising an eyelid, so indifferently ¯ how selfish was he! How lustful was he! How enamoured of women! Is it the reward he offered his own son who had treated him like a god for the sake of his own name and fame? Is this his love for his son? There was no use in thinking and wailing now. He had no right to demand the kingdom defying his father. It was not wise to get into a situation when others too could question like Kaika. It was best to seem abiding to the command of his father.

Rama decided about his future quickly and controlled himself. Smiling, obediently he said, "Mother, your wishes will be fulfilled without fail. Was it needed for you to ask boons from his Excellency for the sake of such a small wish? You could well have told me in advance! Don't you know my nature? Who else is Bharata? Wasn't he born along with me? Don't you know what affection I have for Bharata? I would have given up with pleasure to him my fortunes, my life and even my wife. Then won't I give up a kingdom? Let it be as you wish! I'll go to the forest today wearing garments of bark."

Rama saluted Kaika bowing. He looked at Kaika's face hopefully, expecting that she feeling remorseful at his good words would say, "Oh! How can I send such an excellent man to the forests" and drop her boons feeling shame saying, "No, my boy! Don't go! Let the coronation be for you"

Kaika sighed and said to Rama, "Well my boy! Do that. Not that I do not have love for you, but I have done my duty as a mother to my child. I have no need to tell you anything more since you know all the politics. Being a good person you have obeyed your father's commands. Your father was terribly agitated whether his promises would be carried out and he would get access to the holy worlds. Now he will be extremely happy", said she and looked at Dasaratha.

The king gathering courage and with happiness that his dream of the fortune of embracing Rambha had not become unreal rose up, and looked at Rama with bent head pitifully.

Rama forsook the hope that Kaika would drop her boons. Expecting that his father would be kind enough to him and looking with side long glance at his father, turned to Kaika. "Can I cause the sin of untruthfulness on my father, being his son? What is my life for if not useful to the service of my father, *is it for burning away*? Is he a son who transgresses his father's order? How sons defy their fathers' commands, I wonder greatly. For myself I do not want anything else except my father's pleasure. The pleasure that I derive from obeying my father's command, I don't get it from any other comfort. My father's happiness is my happiness. I don't want the kingdom, I don't want heaven, I don't want Sita, and I don't want this life even. Can I bear my father, as great as an ocean, grieving?" Rama went on like this recounting his filial devotion in various ways. Rama expected that his father would be inspired by his devotion and father's affection for him would overflow and father would suddenly rise from his bed and say, "My lad! Do not go to the forests. Let hell come to my lot. I will not fulfill the boons of Kaika. Come on, I'll crown you." Rama, stood obediently looking with the last hope of getting his father's favour, *like one who eagerly seeks a blade of grass while being washed off in a sea.*

King Dasaratha who had been sitting all the while, pretended to cough, turned his head aside and reclined silently.

Rama was angry beyond bounds. His eyes burnt fiercely. Veins whizzed all over his body. His blood boiled with terrible fury. His hand reached the hilt of his sword.

The man who had declared the decision of his coronation the previous day in the court assembly, the man who had called him into his confidential chamber and discussed the issue — why was he *not opening his mouth* and uttering a single word? Why had he given all the powers to his pet wife and lay down like a living-dead person? Why couldn't he inform me whatever he wanted as a father?….Did the king think he would lose face if he said so?

He felt so loathsome realising his helplessness the next moment as he felt agitated the moment he saw his father's unkindness. With indifferent looks, bending face down, he stood for long in silence. "Mother! I do not have attachment to these treasures and wealth, nor for ruling the kingdom. Basically I am like an ascetic. Thinking that 'Kshatriya' duty is the duty for salvation and obeying father's dictates is my shelter, I hoped to rule duty bound and not that …", said Rama, like all others in the world who would talk stoically after chances slip out of their hands. "I am least worried that I will not get the kingdom. Forsaking all these pleasures I shall set out for my exile. There, in those thick forests, amidst cruel wild animals, in those frightening places deserted by people, eating some root or fruit I will put myself through the fourteen years. Why don't I…I'll," so muttering, sighing, he stood controlling his anger.

During those moments — during that conflict — his inner voice raised its head with instinctive awareness — "What the hell is this deceitful acting for me? I do not act. I do not like it. Should I go to that Dandakaranya? I don't go. If you don't give me the kingdom, all right, stop it. But who has the right to send me out into the midst of wild animals from among human beings? None has it. Will father make me do a thing I do not like? I will not do it. Why should I? Why should sons serve fathers with such slavishness? I won't do it. Let the Vedas come. I'll tear them down to pieces! Let the gods come. I'll chop them to pieces. Father's command, it is! Command! I will not obey it! It is my will. My will. My will…", so it cried uproariously with a squeamish voice. Rama's body bristled at the defiance coming from the inner voice. His face brightened with glow and light. The happiness was being felt as freedom in every atom of the body. Great peace that had never been felt before!

Rama jerked with a shake for a moment in that ecstasy. What are these shouts? What are these noises? From where? From the inner voice? From his own inner voice? So much of disobedience, so much of defiance, from his inner voice? Where from is this inner voice? In a body that has grown filling veins with the essence of filial devotion and essence of the Vedas, how has this unholy inner voice intruded? How has it made such base blasphemy? How has it made such base atheistic roar? It should not be tolerated. The freedom of the inner voice should not be tolerated. The state of this inner voice — which is raging with every minute to ruin his name and fame, to make him a butt of ridicule — should get suppressed tyrannically.

Rama diverting all his anger on his inner voice, raging with fury — seizing the filial devotion shining like sword and the essence of the Vedas in either hand, plunged on his inner voice with a jump. He beat, struck — trampled — bit — putrefied the already weak inner voice — *pushing it to a corner vein* under his heels making sure that it would not rise up for even a thousand lives, wiped off the anxiety on his face and smearing it with calmness, folding hands in humility said, "Mother! I shall take leave of you. See that Bharata will perform his service to father. I am saying this because service to father is the ultimate virtue." He thought that father would melt the last minute and suddenly call him back and say, "Come on, let us go for your coronation." Expecting that, he walked out of the chamber looking back…back again.

Lakshmana stood bowing there.

Straightening his neck and back, which he had bowed until then in various postures, Rama walked forward with a face looking solemn and attempting to walk properly.

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Kausalya who was getting the daily worship done by Brahmins, seeing Rama arrive, came near and said with a bright face, "My lad! It is a feast to the eyes to see you in these clothes. How much more royal brightness will there be on your face when you become emperor of the Kosala Empire! Your father will not go back on his word. He will crown you now. Sit on this resting place for a while, lad! Have the refreshments of your choice." She showed him a seat affectionately.

Rama could not control his grief, however much he tried. His head sagged with dejection. "Why all these gem studded seats for me, when I am supposed to sit on hard boulders in Dandakaranya?" said he, bending his head.

Kausalya, turning pale, said in haste, "What? What is it that you say, my son?"

Lakshmana too looked as if he had not understood anything.

Recovering at once and looking solemnly Rama said, "Mother! Don't grieve. Pick up courage and listen. My father Dasaratha has decided to pass on the kingdom to Bharata. He has commanded me to go into exile to the forests for fourteen years and lead the life of an ascetic. He called me to step-mother Kaika's chamber and conveyed this to me." Rama remained silent.

Kausalya felt amazed and understood the whole affair. The thunderbolt, which she had been afraid of falling with a palpitation every day, had fallen. So at last Bharata would get the kingdom. Kindling hope for Rama all these days was only to deceive him ultimately? Apart from this, exile? For fourteen years? — She sat down weeping bitterly in a loud voice. With her wailing the worship and auspicious instrumental music in the harem ceased. The queens and maids stood stunned.

Kausalya bemoaned recapitulating the entire past, "What terrible tidings have I heard! How unfortunate am I ! All my worship and austerity all these years have been futile! Have not received any pleasure from your father all these years! Bringing a fellow wife every month he burnt fire in my heart and never gave me any pleasure? I dreamt that I would have no loss after you were born. All these seventeen years, since your thread ceremony was over, I have been eagerly waiting for your coronation. In the end, this terrible thing has happened! Kaika's obstinacy succeeded! Now all the other queens will go over to Kaika's side. They will hurl caustic hints at me. Nominally I am the chief queen but even now I am inferior to Kaika's maids. What respect will I have from tomorrow? How can I suffer the egoism of Kaika from tomorrow? Alas! When shall I get death?" She went on wailing with out consolation and wept thinking about the insults she would face under Bharata's rule and the tyranny of Kaika.

Kausalya did not know that Kaika too with the same fear had imagined the cold shouldered treatment she would get under Rama's rule and Kausalya's power and had shuddered.

Lakshmana hearing the news shook with rage. He was frightened at the thought of his low position if Rama did not get the kingdom. With a vengeance that the heaven in hand had slipped, Lakshmana got unprecedented daring and courage. "Brother, sir, it is no use of your obeying father's order with regard to the power of the kingdom.[40] He has become senile. He has gone mad. He dances to the tune of his darling wife, not able to overcome his lust for women. This is all a conspiracy hatched by Dasaratha and Kaika to pass on the kingdom to

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40. Ayodhya kanda, sargas 20 to 23: Lakshmana's desire for the kingdom and defiance of god; Kausalya's contempt for her husband and remnants of matriarchy; consolidation of patriarchal traditions in the words of Rama — we find all these aspects. ★

Bharata. It is very heinous to act on the word of a woman. A great man like you going to forest on the word of a woman? No, you should not resort to such mean acts. There is no need to obey father's dictum in this situation." Lakshmana shouted with rage.

The next moment he lowered his tone, "Brother, sir, every thing is ready for the coronation. Let the coronation take place first. We will occupy the kingdom. If any of Bharata's followers come in the way I shall see their end with my heroism and the strength of my shoulders. I'll destroy any millions and billions of armies. Are the swords and arrows in my hands there for the sake of ornaments? If the king himself comes in the way we shall cut him off with one stroke. If you take pity on his old age we will push him into prison. Let us see how he gives the kingdom to Bharata over us." So saying Lakshmana drew out the sword suddenly from the sheath, raised his back and started fighting in the air.

Rama was extremely amazed with the words of Lakshmana. Has this ambition of kingdom stimulated even Lakshmana who hardly ever stood up holding his head high! Is it the peculiar efficacy hidden in power and riches? "Let us kill father! Let us occupy the kingdom!" How daringly he said!

Rama got very angry with Lakshmana feeling jealousy that he had uttered so many words which he (Rama) himself could not utter openly fearing to risk name and fame. Imprudent daring of reproachment of father in front of him! With the joy of seizing the chance of finding faults and moralizing others with rebuke, Rama rebuked Lakshmana strongly but with soft words. "Lakshmana! Put back the sword in the sheath. Why you, a great man, talk like women without considering the good and bad of a thing. It seems you have forgotten our family name and fame. Is it the way a son of Dasaratha should talk? Our father regrets that he may not reach heaven by the sin of falsehood. We have to remove his worry, give him joy, send him to those lands, which we too should reach. Why have you become a lay man ignorant of the subtleties of *Dharma* (virtue, duty, righteousness, justice)?"

Lakshmana hesitated for a moment, put back the sword in the sheath and stood without lowering his head.

Rama might have rebuked Lakshmana, but consoling himself in answer to the surging turmoil, sorrow and heaping questions within himself, he said, "Lakshmana! All is ordained by Destiny! Divine disposition! Kaikeyi is only instrumental. Are we not aware of our stepmother's affection? If she demands such boons, don't you think it is the consequence of Fate? Somehow God has done this. Some how he designed this exile." So saying Rama sighed. Not being able to bear the thought that simply human beings had done injustice and insult to them and so fabricating that supra human values for their sorrows and defeats, human beings console themselves. In the same manner, Rama too made Lakshmana believe that his exile was devised by god for some extraordinary purpose and tried to make himself believe it.

If that deprivation fell to Bharata or some other prince, Lakshmana would have believed strongly "the work of Destiny." He felt it very ignorant at the moment to speculate some other reason for the loss and the enemies who had created it, were clearly visible before the eyes. He, bringing out the logical understanding which lay hidden in some corner of the brain and bowing to his elder brother, asked, "Pardon me, Brother, sir! Has god appeared before any body at any time? Pardon me, brother, sir." Lakshmana asked with hesitation and stood with a shiver.

Rama was very glad that he had got an opportunity to preach knowledge to an ignorant man, but the question Lakshmana asked shivering irked him a lot. Rama had asked many sages such questions in his childhood, had many discussions about Divinity with a natural curiosity. "Has any one of you seen god? Have you understood the reason for the creation of this world? If the world is the creation of god, who created that god?" The sages could not give Rama satisfactory answers.

"This is all what we know about god, boy! We told you what we had heard. We don't know more than this" — no sage, not even once, admitted with such words. Perplexed, going upside-down, they pushed the present discussion of knowledge to Vedic times back, "One should not question what the Vedas say, my boy."

"Who wrote the Vedas, sir?" asked Rama, long time ago!

"Oh! Have you not heard that the Vedas are not of human but divine origin? No Man wrote them. God created them."

"That is God wrote them in the sky and threw them down? In which country did he throw? Who saw him throwing like that?"

"You are yet a kid…Rama!"

"Why do you say a kid…a kid? You are not able to clear the doubts of such a kid! How does a kid get knowledge if great men of meditation like you don't tell him about god?" Rama questioned impudently. Since he was young and not yet well versed in humility and obedience, Rama's doubts about God did not vanish even after reading the Vedas except in the case of Sacrifices and offerings, charity and endowments. "Not able to welcome and receive new thoughts and new knowledge, why stop with Vedic principles and the preaching of the sages? Why are there boundaries for acquiring knowledge be fixed?" — Such questions used to shoot through the mental sky of Rama like lightening and disappear, now and then.

Now that childhood stage and wish for enquiry had passed. In due course no answers were found for the doubts and the doubts themselves passed away. There was a compromise with the scriptural principles. The intoxication of name and fame enveloped him.

Rama put an elderly and solemn look to the possible extent so that Lakshmana would not get the courage of asking any further questions, and said, "My boy, we should never doubt the Divinity that put forward by Law codes and Sages." Rama evaded Lakshmana's question with that word "never." Rama had grown to that stage when without hesitation he could tell others the same reason, which if the sages told him, he felt unsatisfactory and disturbing. Lakshmana, for the matter of Destiny, you ask? I'll tell you surely, listen. If it is not the work of Fate why should Kaika, who loves me so much, have such wicked thoughts? Kaikeyi born in a Royal family causing sorrow to her husband like a base woman? Why doubt still? Destiny is exceedingly powerful, is it not clear? Some deeds do not materialize, however devotedly they are done. Some deeds materialise even if they are done carelessly. What do you call if not fate? If some thing happens good, we have to understand that god is favourable to us. If something goes wrong, we have to understand that god is against us. great sages like Viswamitra, yielding to lust and anger, ruined their meditation, if not fate, what else? Pain and pleasure, wrath and heat, death and birth are all the resolutions of god," said he, explaining the knowledge of Brahma verbatim which he had learnt from the sages.

"You are still young. Your acquisition of knowledge is insufficient." At the end Rama perorated, forgetting that he and Lakshmana had been born on the same day!

The logic in the brain of Lakshmana, which raised its back somewhat, also raised its head a bit. He felt many doubts in the reasoning of Rama. The reason for Kaika's wicked thought was quite obvious. It was the selfish ambition of getting the kingdom for her son. It should be challenged instead of accepting it as god's will. He swung in that doubt.

Seeing the courage lurking timidly in the eyes of Lakshmana and shrinking at a new question about to come from Lakshmana, Rama attempted to escape from the questions of Lakshmana. "You have all this grief, because the kingdom is lost? This is fate, I believe. So I have quashed my anguish, you also should reconcile yourself to it." If his exile is the consequence of his fate, if it is the punishment given by god for some past sins of his, Rama did not proclaim what sacrifice he was going to make for his father's command.

The idea that his brother had decided to give up the kingdom, made Lakshmana crazy. Should this vast Kosala kingdom be given up for good? All the stately mansions, all the wealthy relatives and friends, all the gardens stimulating people with songs, dances and amorous activities, the sacrificial altars pleasant with Vedic chants and scholarly discourses, the temples made auspicious with daily worship and religious vows, the saunters in chariots harnessed to superior breed of horses, beautiful courtesans (damsels) all over the town and country— this Ayodhya with so many comforts and all royal pleasures to be given up to live in forests? How foolish it was !

The royal pleasures overcame the Brahma knowledge preached by Rama and Lakshmana swung with frenzy, "Brother, sir! I do not believe in Destiny. I defy divinity. Paupers and incapacitated people may have fate, but why should we, the brave, have fate? Valorous and efficient people should fulfill their actions with their capacity and should not yield to god. Your Excellency, you are our king from now on. You occupy the kingdom, getting crowned at once, throwing out Dasaratha from the throne. It seems you have doubt, can we wage a battle with the armies of the king? Do we have such strength." We are heroes. All our friends are valorous. Why do we need so many, aren't I myself sufficient? Shall I not destroy millions of armies? Then will it become clear whether divine dispensation is great or human effort is great", said Lakshmana, and looked a mighty force for himself and furiously drew out the sword suddenly.

Till then, not plucking the courage to cross the conversation of sons and letting tears gush down, feeling excessively pleased at Lakshmana's words, Kausalya turned to Rama with sympathy. "My lad! You have heard your younger brother's words. Act on what has to be done!" said she, looking hopefully. "By imprisoning or killing your father or some how occupying the kingdom. You must become the king. I should become the Queen-Mother. All my fellow wives, including Kaika, should live under my authority"— was the feeling that loomed in Kausalya's anxiety and caution.

Rama was engrossed in deep thought and stood motionless. He felt something creep up from his heels to his knees quickly. Lakshmana's words seemed worth carrying out. Why should he bend down his head, despite his prowess? Mother's wish too is the same. If I occupy the kingdom acting independently…? If I become the Emperor…? If I become the ruler of Kosala empire…? Rama was jerked by the thought and shook his leg. His inner voice slipped down to his heel at once and groaned. The furious rage of Lakshmana too possessed him! Fearing that he would surrender completely, Rama looking sharply at Lakshmana roused with wrath. "Lakshmana? Have you gone crazy? You prate like one gone mad! Sri Rama occupying the throne defying father's command? It will not happen even in a dream. Human beings live for a short while. Have you estimated me as one base man eagerly grieving for contemptible land sacrificing our family name and fame? You may divert the course of planets with your valour, but not Sri Rama from the path of virtue."

Lakshmana's *back* bent down. The sword in his hand slipped into the sheath. Rama felt exceedingly proud about his self-control, and of not straying from the path of virtue and surrendering to the instigation of Lakshmana.

Shedding tears with disappointment, Kausalya said, "My Boy! Is it just for you? Will you go away leaving your old mother? Your father has other sons. Your absence may not trouble him. Who else do I have except you? Is it not your duty to pay heed to your mother? Did not Kashyapa go to heaven by serving his mother in the past? There is no scope for the fear that you may not get heaven by rejecting your father and serving mother ", saying so, she saw in him a son not yearning for her with love, but for heaven.

Rama shook his head objectionably. "Mother! Those days are gone! I too heard some stories that all children worshipped their mothers in those ignorant days when their fathers' identity was not known. But times have changed. All law codes din into the ears about filial devotion to father. In our Ikshavaku dynasty sons follow their father's orders. Have you not heard the story that Sagara's sons while digging the nether world obeying their father's words sacrificed their lives? Have you not heard the holy story of Parasurama who killed his mother at the command of his father? Even if it caused sorrow to mothers, sons must carry out deeds that give happiness to their father. My father is the head of a great empire. Is it proper for you to wish for my obeying your order defying such a great king's word?" so saying Rama remonstrated his mother with a sort of solemnity.

Kausalya bent down her head. She felt terrible shame. A son whom she had borne for nine months, given birth to and brought up in her lap, stood on this day in front of her saying, "Who is mother? What is the use of worshipping mother? My father's opulence and fortunes, my family fame and reputation, my holy lands..." caused her such dejection in life that had never been felt before. Shedding tears in a gush, she said, "My lad! I am ignorant of all the virtues you know. I can not survive even a moment without you. I wish your presence before me anywhere. Nothing but grief is left to me in this harem. I too will come with you to forests. I shall pass the time looking after your welfare. Take me also with you." She wiped her tears.

Rama felt sorry about the ignorance of his mother. "Mother, are these the words an excellent woman like you should say? Should a woman live on abandoning her husband? Service for a husband is a woman's salvation, is it not?" Kausalya's body trembled contemptuously at the thought of her husband, "I do not want any salvation or heaven, my lad! The remaining years of my life spent with you will itself be heaven to me"

Rama was unhappy over the disobedience of his mother. "Talking like this is not becoming of a woman. A husband is a god for a woman. It is futile performing any number of religious vows if the worship of a husband is not performed. Whatever sort of a man the husband might be, a woman who does not revere him as a god and worship him is the most wretched woman. Women, who offer prayers to their husbands devotedly, will go to heaven happily, even if they never salute the gods and Brahmins. There also, they get happiness by serving their husbands. All these rules of good conduct are in the Vedas and codes and haven't you heard them from our elders?", said Rama, looking at his mother sternly.

Kausalya bent her head down, eyes filled with tears. She had come to her in-law's place long ago when she was six. She innocently trusted the husband who had already been filled with lust for women. She clamoured for that husband's affection and grew up. She offered him on a platter all her beauty, youth, soul and health to him. All through her life she lived in the shade of her husband, though he terribly insulted her, terribly scorned her, as is the course of the world and grew old. In this old age her own son preached to her the duties of women and virtuousness anew and that innocent mother looked at her son perplexed. She — an innocent mother not aware of the fact that a man treats his mother, or sister as a woman and endeavours to bind them all through their lives to the service of man — felt satisfied imagining Rama as a little infant and a boy without any selfishness or complexes. She ceased the effort of stopping her son. "I shall do as you desire. I will live out my years in the service of your father! All right, go into exile to the forests, my lad! Your commitment to truth will protect you. Gods, ancestors, sun and moon, the rulers of all corners, fire-god, star constellations and all forces of Nature will protect you. I'll worship and perform fire sacrifices for your safety. Give charity to Brahmins. All my piousness will protect you from difficulties, wild beasts, Rakshasas and all calamities. I shall await your return after fourteen years, sustaining my life *with eyes as torches*. Live happily, my lad!" said Kausalya reclining on the seat, deeply drowned in the *sea of sorrow*.[41]

Rama left his mother, moved on to other

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41. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 39, sloka 36: In this context, we will know the fact that Dasaratha had 350 wives in addition to the three wives Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaika. "Rama reported in detail so far and looked at his three hundred and fifty mothers. He saluted to the mothers who were wailing like his mother." The king has 353 wives!

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work with filial devotion and ambition of fame.

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"I too come with you. I can not live even for a moment without you," said Sita, without any perturbation, and saw Rama raising her eyes, transparently.

She did not feel excessive sorrow on learning that the coronation had been stopped. She did not have the awareness that her husband had not become the king. She was shaken by the thought that her husband would be away from her for fourteen years. She feared that she would have to spend an empty lonely life when her husband was preparing for the exile in the forest giving up all royal comforts. She, with moist eyes, innocently said to Rama with diffidence. "Don't go away leaving me behind, sir."

Rama surprised, saw as if asking, "What is this strangeness."

A Royal woman, who should live honourably with out even openly looking at the sun and the moon, and who ought to live according to the norms of a harem, going in to forests? This is not at all possible! "Do you speak being aware of the pros and cons? What do you think about a life in the forests?" he said scornfully and looked at Sita with dismay.

Sita lowered her eyes in humility.

Rama continued serenely, "Have you ever seen a forest? Have you ever heard of a forest? Dense forests are terribly frightening, you know! Lions, tigers, bears, wild buffaloes roam freely even during broad day light, calling out wildly. Terrible snakes crawl about lying across the path like mountains. Crocodiles swim floating like canoes on the rivers. Huge trees intertwine with branches, without space for sun rays and moon rays to pierce through, making it pitch dark. Snakes crawl along the creepers on the stems, indistinguishable from a creeper suddenly drop down..." so saying Rama shrugged his shoulders "Sita, do you hear? The entire forest ground will be filled with projections of stones, and reed like swords, and amidst them, scorpions, locusts, forest flies, and with insects pricking like needles making it impossible to move ahead even a step. In the green grass, green sna...k..es..." Rama paused.

Sita lowered her eyes and was listening.

Rama left the snakes and resumed his description.

"During some seasons strong gusty winds blow shaking the entire forests, in some other seasons rains transform forests into seas, and sometimes *within the batting of an eyelid* forest fires rage destroying the entire forest...Sita!" so saying Rama stopped, unable to guess further. He thought differently at first in his filial devotion, now, thinking about forest life brought a feeling that it should not even be wished upon an enemy. Had father ordered his exile fully aware of all these cruelties? How wicked! The punishment of an exile to a forest? Why? What crime did I commit? Is it because I was ready for the coronation as per his orders? How can I defy father's command? If it is a crime, it is a crime committed by my father. Why give the punishment to me? What punishment will be given to my father? Who will impose that punishment?

The dreadful nature of the forest which he described to Sita presented a new picture to Rama and hence another tide of fury rose in Rama's mind and against his father.

Sita heard the description of the forests, stayed unmoved and looked at Rama with a smile. With a confidence that every woman would have in her husband's ability for some time in the early days of their marriage Sita said "Sir! All these you have told me are comforts for me and not troubles. You are a very great hero and you can protect me. If I stand in your shadow, I'll never have the fear of any serpents, the fear of any trouble, the fear of any wild beasts" and lowered her eyes with a sense of security.

Rama fell into a thought, frightened himself with his own description of the forest. Right from childhood up to this time he had grown up with the service of attendants, protection of body guards, comfortably and safely and now the thought of living a lonely life in the forests - it sent in shivers in a hero like him. Why should he carry another load on the back? When a lion or a tiger is pursued, and the arrow slipped out or he failed to remember a sacred hymn, one had to take to one's heels or climb a tree! Then how was he to protect a weak woman? Apart from this, if women supposed to live honorably in harems, chambers and curtains if came out into the open and roamed about in forests, how inappropriate it would be? How ignominious it would be! Many strange, lustful men would stare at the beauty of women!...Sita too...Oh! Terrible to think of it even! No, it should not be!

Trying to convince Sita, skilfully and softly Rama said, "I can make it fearless of wild beasts with my valour. But, what comforts will you have in the forests, Sita? Good food? Comfortable dwelling? Attendants and maids? You never experienced the sun and can you lie down on the hard ground eating leaves and roots? None will be there to serve you. Instead of that, you yourself will have to serve many guests, sages and me. Many Rakshasas lurk about to kidnap human females. That is all the more frightening. Listen to me. It is the duty of the wife to obey her husband. Forget the matter about coming to the forests." He looked at her solemnly as if cautioning her not to talk about it again! He continued, "Sita! Stay back here serving the in-laws. Salute my father and my three hundred and fifty three mothers daily. Go on worshipping Brahmins and deities. Bharata is becoming the king. You need to be very obedient to him! Otherwise, he will not be obliged to support you. Conduct yourself favourably to Bharata's wives and according to their will. Never praise me in front of Bharata. Kings will never tolerate the praise of others except themselves. They will allow those, who are obedient and servile, to live comfortably. If one does not do so, they develop hatred even for their own offspring. That is why it is not good for you to become hateful to Bharata. Spend the time performing rituals, religious ceremonies, fasts and serving Bharata and his wives till I return." So preaching her duties, he looked at her immutably. Rama had not felt the sorrow of making his wife, who had been living devotedly with him, a maid-servant to others. Only comfort in the service of kings not baseness of such an action was seen by him.

The words of her husband made Sita angry and sorrowful that she had never felt before. Trembling with the heaviness of insult, Sita looked at Rama raising her eyes. "Is it manliness for you to leave your wife in the service of others and honourable for me to live without my husband serving others? Like a vile fellow who leaves his young wife to strange men, is it fitting for a hero like you to leave me at the mercy of your brother! Is it for this that my father gave me in your hands? I have no need to go on serving your parents abandoning you. For me, service to you is important and not service to the others", so saying she shed tears, bowing her head. After some time the anger subsided and she felt remorseful that she had accused her god like husband.

Sita had heard the stories of many virtuous women from her childhood, felt ecstatic with devotion and thought that they were guides to her. She thought that she would never be away in any difficult situations from her husband. Had not Savitri brought her husband back to life pleasing Yama, God of Death, himself? When the world was getting scorched without rains for ten years, had not the great virtuous woman Anasuya created water in the Ganges and fruits on the trees for the sake of the sages? Had she not received respect by making ten nights into one night for the Gods? How many women had earned name and fame doing service to their husbands! What is the life of women for if they are not virtuous? How wasteful! Sita had been ready to serve at the feet of her husband right from her birth. She had perennially entertained thoughts of virtuousness and never had the question of truth and falsehood entered her mind. Never had she any doubts about the natural and unnatural.

Sita felt even glad at her husband's exile, though he did not get the kingdom. She felt eager to proclaim to the world her virtuousness in difficult situations. Now that her husband was thinking of leaving her behind, she talked so defiantly, but not because her obedience had abated. Some how her husband was hesitant to take her along with him. It is not difficult for such a heroic man to protect her! Or is it that for women who are supposed to live in harems, living in forests is not respectful? Or, does her husband doubt her character?

While tears were gushing down from Sita's eyes, she looked at her husband, who was standing motionless. "*Swamy!* (Lord!), I cannot imagine life without you even for a moment. I have heard many number of times, while Brahmins read the Vedas that women are not independent and must live with their husbands. In my childhood my mother and father too taught me all these duties. You are preaching daily to me that there is no pious action other than the worship of a husband. It is the husband who is a prop for a woman either in this world or in the other world. A virtuous woman should experience the hardships or comforts of the husband as her own! After all, what are these comforts of the harem to me who can renounce even the governance of the three worlds, for the sake of serving you at feet? My lord! Why do you suspect me?" Sita realised why her husband was hesitating to take her to the forests. She is anxious to instill confidence in her husband about her modesty. "Shall I look raising eyes at strange men like low class women? Shall I take it into my mind ever any action that will defame the family reputation or by husband's reputation? Trust me, my lord! I don't desire anything else other than service at your feet in this movable and immovable world. I don't desire..." said Sita, looking so transparently and obediently as to instill confidence in Rama.

Rama was greatly moved by Sita's humility. He felt a bit puzzled that she had sensed his doubts. Rama was not aware of his wife being so devoted to him, till then. His face glowed bright with satisfaction. Now during this time, not only his filial devotion to father but his wife's virtuousness also would be made clear to the world. He had to take Sita with him, at least for the sake of his fame, it was a must. It was better having a youthful wife under his protection than leaving her under the care of others. And at this age, life without a wife for fourteen years would also be difficult. Apart from that, he was a monogamous husband! Leaving Sita behind would not be comfortable for him either!

Sita worriedly looked at her husband who was standing engrossed in deep thought. "Lord! Why are you so unkind to me! I shall not cause you any trouble for my sake in those forests. Never do I demand comforts and pleasures. I shall eat the leftovers after you have eaten. I shall please you with my service. I shall walk ahead of you paving the path, so that no thorns prick your feet in the forest. In the life of your companionship all dense forests will become pleasant parks for me. Amidst the charming lakes, crystal river shores, high mountain table lands, in the light of the sun and the moon, swallowed up in the beauty of intrinsic nature becoming united, we can live thousands of years forgetting these mean royal pleasures", said she and looked at him with affection.

Rama found virtuousness in Sita's love. He saw a woman's humility in all the worship of that nature. Rama full of satisfaction in mind, listened solemnly in silence, to a further expression of virtuousness shown by his wife.

Receiving no reply from him Sita's sorrow surged. "Lord! It seems you are not at all willing to take me. The moment you leave me and go, I shall commit suicide somehow and die. I heard Vedas say that a woman will have the only one man for any number of rebirths. I shall live in companionship with you at least in the next birth. Our bond will not be cut off with this birth", said she, bending her head and shedding tears gushingly.

Thus, Rama's heart felt desire was fulfilled. With great pleasure, which a man experience on hearing that his wife would give up her life for her husband, Rama looked at Sita with a smile and said, "Sita, since you are a great virtuous woman, you have decided not to live on without your husband. Because of your devotion to your husband great acclaim will be accorded to both your parents and parents-in-laws' families. I too will no more live without you. I will not go even to heaven leaving you behind. I shall certainly take you along with me to the forests. There you can be happy *serving my feet*. I spoke like this all this while just to test your mettle." Rama saw Sita smiling and with pride. Rama had a new enlightenment of testing the virtuousness of his wife every now and then.

Sita bowed with joy and saluted husband's feet. "Lord, give me any number of fire tests. I shall prove myself to be your '*daasi*'(slave) as long as you have mercy on this poor woman," repeating the words of a virtuous lady in a story which she heard long ago.

Rama suddenly felt depressed as he recalled again the forests and snakes which he had forgotten for some moments. "Sita! We should not disobey Father's command, what can we do? We have to live in the forests, we can not escape that ordeal", he shook his head in despair. Cutting off the welling up unwillingness going into the forests, he braced himself. "Sita, they say in the scriptures that there is no god other than a father to a man. Defying a father, how can we worship god who the eye cannot see.[42]

By showing filial devotion we will get a lot of piety in the other worlds. We will not get such great piety by speaking the truth, doing our duty or making sacrificial offerings. Only by serving our father we go to heaven. They said in scriptures that we go to the 'world of gods', the 'gandharva world', the 'cow world' and many other worlds and at the end we get the 'world of Brahma'. By my devotion to Father I, you by your devotion to your husband will get a good reputation and fame," said he and stopped. After saying to himself of getting so many worlds, mind got inspiration and he got enthusiasm exceeding the fear of exile in the forests. "Sita! Don't delay. Donate all our wealth and riches to the Brahmins", saying this Rama plunged into his preparations. He got '*tom-tommed*' to the Brahmins to receive donations and charity.

He commanded the chief chamber maids in the harem solemnly, "Clean and guard carefully my chamber and Lakshmana's chamber every day. Don't neglect the safe guard of harem because we will be away. Any way we have to come here again some day. Be careful."

Hearing the news of charity donations Brahmins thronged in swarms *as though the earth calved*. Paupers, beggars also came, occupying the open area at a distance from the porch, they sat talking sadly about Rama going into the forests.

Rama summoned money and grains, silver and gold, gems and diamonds, valuable jewellry, clothes in abundance from the treasuries and started donating them to the Brahmins. Rama, along with Lakshmana and his followers raided many towns in every kingdom and got those treasures. Rama owned buildings, secret closets, gardens, cow sheds, chariots, horses and many other things. All that was Rama's wealth.

On hearing the Brahmins reproaching Dasaratha and Kaika, Rama felt happy. "All these treasures are acquired with my valour.[43] There is not even *a perforated cowry* of Dasaratha in it. Each of you take what you want. There is fulfillment to my acquisition if it is useful to Brahmins", so saying he solemnly conducted charity and donations. He also donated hand maids to Brahmins. He distributed chariots, horses and heaps of money to his friends. He warned his maids, "Give that to them who is worthy of it."

"Rama! There is no such an excellent man as you in the three worlds. Troubles do not persist for ever. You can acquire a thousand fold treasure after your return from forest dwelling! We wish you well!" so saying Brahmins blessed him, remembering Kaika happily for the load of the silver and gold bundles.

After gratifying Brahmins and friends, Rama gave some gifts to attendants and handmaids.

At the end, the slave maids gave handfuls of alms to beggars, who gathered in crowds.[44]

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[42] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 30, sloka 33:** Rama himself revealed the naked truth that 'god does not appear to the eye'. ★

[43] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 32, slokas 44 & 42:** Rama acquired all that wealth without any connection with his father's wealth. So, how did he acquire it? ★

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Urmila who had just finished drawing, with the brush in the hand, was looking with a smile fixedly at that drawing— There were two white birds in the drawing! On a twig blooming fully, one moving accommodating in the wings of the other—one pecking the beak of the other!

Urmila looked at the garden with extreme joy. All over the garden hundreds of birds of different colours and many varieties were there. Chirping, jumping, flying, but nowhere was the variety she had drawn. She looked at the picture again. Some hundreds of live birds were flying from branch to branch, then why make this lifeless picture? What beauty was there in this stillness? Would the imagination that was far from reality give happiness to a real body and mind? Urmila looked at the picture dissatisfied.

In the meanwhile her favourite maid Vasanti came running, saw Urmila sitting dissatisfied, holding back the matter she was about to tell her, seeing the picture with pleasure remarked, "How beautiful! When did you draw this?"

Urmila hesitatingly said, "I have drawn it Vasanti, but there is no bird of this sort in the garden. What birds are these? Pigeons? Grey eyed mynas? My drawing seems to have created a new variety!" She laughed.

Vasanti too laughed, "We shall give new names to our pictures. These are Urmila birds. Is that all right?" She looked at Urmila affectionately.

"How silly you are! Instead of pointing out what the flaw is, why do you give them new names? Come sit here, look straight. How long will they sit like that without moving! Without speaking! lifeless? Look on like that attentively. How frightening will it be, see. They look dead, see!"

Vasanti looked at Urmila with kindness. Vasanti clearly knew the melancholy in Urmila's words. "Vasanti! Tell me truly! Are they not frozen like stones? Who are you reminded of on seeing these birds?

"No one, madam"

"All are lies, I know! Why is there so much secrecy? Shall I tell you who they are? In these lifeless pictures the birds are Urmila and Lakshmana, don't you see?"

"Oh, no! Don't say that. Why are you depressed?"

"Depression! For me! You seem like a mad cap!" Urmila laughed unenthusiastically.

The sweet life with her husband for Urmila had become a dream. Lakshmana had focussed all his energies in the service of his brother. He had made devotion to brother and service to brother his goal in life. He was practicing the ritual of 'carrying out the commands of his brother'.

It is written in the scriptures that to attain salvation, a man may worship his father, brother or Brahmins, but no scriptures talk about the duty of living with love for his wife.

Lakshmana's marriage, the arrival of his wife—all had taken place according to custom on the auspicious moments fixed by Brahmins, in the ancestral family tradition. After that he had forgotten all about his wife.

Urmila waited for some time with great hope and love for her husband's affection. But time comforted her in her disappointment. Music, drawing, sports and songs with companions, time would pass with new enthusiasm for some time and sagging spirits some time, to her.

"How miserable you are, dear! Life has become lonely without companionship for you", would the maids feel sorry for her. Then Urmila laughs with full of kindness and would say, "Are there not hundreds of queens and maids in this harem living a life never knowing the touch of men? When there is so much despon-

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44. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 32, sloka 45: Rama distributed gifts to Brahmins, friends, maids and beggars in a fitting manner (*Yathartha sanman*!) This means, when a king like Rama distributes all riches and wealth, what beggars get is a fistful of grains only. Beggars and people who live in dire poverty don't benefit from the charity and donations of great donors. All the valuable charities are confined only to a few.

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dency before my eyes, will it not be shameful for me alone to be happy? If I share your misfortune, I will be happy."

Urmila, turning her attention from the birds flying in the garden, asked, "Vasanti! The coronation of the eldest has been stopped, I hear! What will they do now?" she turned her face to the garden indifferently.

Vasanti, coming near, said, "I have come hurrying to tell you about it. All the preparations are over. Sita will also accompany her husband into the forests. Your husband will also go with his brother..."

Urmila smiled. "How foolish you are,! Should you tell that specially", said she, searching for new birds.

"Madam, will you too accompany your husband?" Vasanti asked tenderly.

Urmila turned her head and was surprised. " My husband? Who is my husband?" She saw angrily.

Vasanti in a pacifying manner affectionately rebuked her. "If you say this, will the people approve? Look that side. All the Brahmins laud Sita as a great loyal wife. Why should you suffer a bad name?"

Urmila, just not caring, "How can I get so much devotion as Sita has got?" she laughed.

"They say all law codes proclaim that a woman should follow her husband whatever sort of a man he may be. Don't you know that much? Women who serve their husbands get heaven! Don't they?"

"It is for men, heaven and the embraces of Rambha. But what will women do with heaven?"

"There too serve their husband..."

"Oh, enough! There too the same husband for me?"

"Madam! It will be no use if you delay this way with fun and frolic. There, all of them are setting out."

"Let them set out. Their hopes are theirs. That father is sending his son to the forest for the sake of his piety. That son for the sake of piety is going away from his father. What piety is that? Is it visible? What do they do with that? — Vasanti! In our home town there was an atheist Brahmin. He also read many scriptures. Never did he perform rituals or rites. Nowhere did he accept gifts of charity. How great were his words! Sita used to feel it sinful to have his words in ears. He used to prophesy laughing to our elder sister, "You will become a great virtuous woman, my girl"! Truly, it has come to pass. Vasanti! I just ask not knowing, in heaven will Rambha embrace the old king also? Will he become a youth? Or will he be trembling and coughing in Rambha's embrace? What a pity! It may be Rambha's fate! — By the by, Vasanti, will first king Dasaratha and after him his sons also revel in the embrace of that Rambha? Ugh! How repulsive! Don't tell me about that heaven. I'll commit sin to the best of my ability and go to hell. That is enough, get the lutes (veenas), let us practise some new tunes", said Urmila and saw again the picture of the birds. The picture looked very beautiful. Both the birds appeared to be chirping with life.

Urmila with joy said, "Vasanti, if these get life...? And looked in amazement.

Vasanti laughed. "They will fly over your head and run away into the garden" saying so she brought the lute and handed it over to Urmila.

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The news of Rama's exile to the forests spread through the city. People were talking about it every where. Brahmins, Royal relatives, high officials and the wealthy gathered in full strength in the chamber of Dasaratha. Gathering in crowds every where. "What filial devotion Rama has! What an excellent man!"

"How truthful Dasaratha is! How virtuous, O!"

"What a wicked woman is Kaika! How cruelly she is separating father and son!" So talking loudly and sighing, looking on either side, they whispered to people next to them. "Originally Bharata had the right to the kingdom. Dasaratha had made a promise long ago! We did not know it all these days! Then how had he got ready to back out of his promise! Added to this, he is reputed to be truthful. Had we known this we would have dealt with Bharata himself...Don't talk aloud...somebody is coming"

Some intellectuals regretted a lot. "His Excellency has done an unwise thing! He should have carried out the coronation of Rama by sending Kaika to her father's place. What do you say?" they said.

"Will king Kekaya tolerate if such an act were done? Won't he come with armies to attack Dasaratha?"

"If he were to come, Rama would take care of it! Is Rama incapable of doing that? After ruling the kingdom for so many years, why could not the king realise such a petty thing?"

"Since Kaika is a woman, he may have thought that she would not have so much cleverness and daring!"

"Whatever it may be, when Bharata comes tomorrow, we have to try to *curry his favour*" so discussing and again aloud they said, "How worthy Rama is! What an excellent man!"

Listening to the praises of people, Rama with a solemn face, was standing before Dasaratha — he wore just a loin-cloth, no silk clothes, and no ornaments. 'Is this Rama the same Rama who always *shines with handsomeness*?' — a doubt arose in the minds of the people.

Lakshmana also was standing by his elder brother clad in loin-cloth. Sita covering a loin-sari over a silk sari, stood bending head bashfully.

Dasaratha plucked up courage on seeing his sons in the attire of sages, ready for exile. He gained the confidence that Rama would not defy him and occupy the kingdom. That father, who had not spoken a single word to his sons, bending his head and shedding tears began to speak, "My lad! I suffer deceit having granted boons to Kaika. I am bound by truth. Yet, I do not wish for you to live in the forests. Defy me and get the coronation done. It will be a great fortune for me if you stay before my eyes. Why worship a father like me?" He sat lowering his head.[45]

Rama was not unaware of the intention in the mind of Dasaratha behind his words. Father, who had not looked up at him raising eyes when he came ready to go to the forests wearing a loin-cloth after giving away in charity all that he had, now saying, "My lad! Defying me, take away the kingdom", had not given any consolation to Rama. It was Rama's experience since childhood, that his father would treat his son's freedom and defiance as a great insult to him and taint his reputation. Rama, who realised that his father was saying those words to proclaim his own generosity to the world, attempted to exhibit his own nobility, bent further in humility and said, "Your Excellency! I am your son! Your servant! Shall I resort to the sin of defying my own father and lord? I can abandon all my pleasures, my life, heaven and even Sita for your happiness." So saying he saluted Dasaratha further bowing low.

Sita, standing by with a lowered head, was thunderstruck. "Sita! I'll not go to heaven even, leaving you behind"— these sweet words of Rama are in her ears still. Now he says, "I'll abandon Sita for you." Seeing such a husband she felt dejected and stood bending her head sadly.

Chambers in the harem were reverberating with the wailing of the many queens.

Dasaratha, coughed slightly, shook his head and said, "I know, my lad! You are the epitome of good qualities. You will bring honours for our Raghu clan. You are making such a sacrifice for the happiness of your father. Who else would do so other than you? No, none will. Rama is Rama! Your filial devotion...commitment to sacrifice..." cough

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45. Ayodhya kanda, sargas 34 to 36: See amount of truth and the amount of hypocrisy in the words of Dasaratha while Rama was leaving the kingdom. He says to Rama, "Defy me and celebrate the coronation". Does he say this with a desire that his son must do so? Will Dasaratha be happy if Rama really opposes him and occupies the kingdom? He won't be at all happy. Then why such talk? He talks so because he has to speak for the sake of the world! The whole thing is self-deception and a deception of the world. There is deception in the norms, the vows of truth and the ways of life of the people themselves. ★

really interrupted his eulogy and he had to stop praising Rama. The cough in stages swallowed great praises.

Rama looked solemn.

Dasaratha stopped coughing and began to speak shaking his head up and down in admiration. "Even when you are told not to go to the forests, you don't stop? Your determination is great. Can I change your mind and your devotion to your father? You will get all the pleasures on this earth and the other worlds by serving my feet! There is no doubt about it." Thinking that his son might doubt this world and the other world, he instilled confidence in him. He again began to shake his head comforting him and said, "Lad! Even in the forests you can be happy. Yes it will not be very troublesome. The forest has great and mighty trees, rivers, a large variety of birds, and seeing all of them will be pleasant. Hunting animals every day, visiting holy places and discussing the Vedas with the sages…hmm…all right, it will be good. But stay back to night. Eat all the dishes you desire, you can set out tomorrow morning", said he, looking kindly and began coughing again.

Rama felt awfully hard, going to the forest life abandoning his many comforts, with his father saying "There too it will be good", before so many people……before Kaika. The world would treat the sacrifice he was making was not special. If forest life were not that difficult, what was the sacrifice that he was going to make? Rama himself had that doubt and he felt depressed. Harsh in the heart, looking at his father solemnly, he said aloud, "No, your Excellency. Eating all dishes of my desire tonight may be well, but who will feed me those from tomorrow? There we will eat some root, herb, leaves, grates or knotted grass. I shall roam amidst the mountains, slopes, pebbles and rocks. By your command all will be comfortable. Don't worry about me, sir" and bent his head.

Dasaratha felt embarrassed. He called in at once a minister, so as to proclaim his guiltlessness. "Send at once armies with Rama, send heroic soldiers, send courtesans, send merchants, send riches and grains, arrange everything without any deficiency for Rama in the forests", he commanded.

Kaika who had been silent till then, intervened, "Your Excellency, in the beginning itself I said that Rama should live the life of a sage in the forest with a loin-cloth. Not even a farthing is to be sent with him. If he is made powerful again by giving armies, heroes and treasures why should he be sent to the forests?" She objected in a *cut and dried way.*

Dasaratha bursting with anger said, "How vile you have become! You are causing trouble to Rama. Is that not enough?" Saying so he looked daggers at her.

"It is not I who is causing troubles to Rama. It is you. He is in trouble as he worships you. He intrigued with you for the kingdom and made his own trouble. Have I asked you to send Lakshmana or Satrughna to the forests? Why should he be ready to accept the kingdom to which he had no right? Yet, the sages say that Rama is a man of self-control, who does not react to pain or pleasure. That he doesn't feel joy at comfort and sorrow at hardships, they praise him! For such a great self-controlled man what is it if they are royal pleasures or a forest life? Why do all of you grieve so much for such a man?" said Kaika and saw piercingly.

Rama intending to divert that topic, said solemnly, "Your Excellency! *What is the use of the saddle for a man who has forsaken the horse?* While living a life of meditation, what is the use of armies or soldiers to me? Don't grieve. I am giving up all these riches and wealth, and beautiful towns. I am sacrificing this vast empire for Bharata. Invite Bharata and crown him king." Rama looked detachedly.

"Amen! Amen!" shouted the Brahmins, as was their habit.

Kaika, raising her eye brows, reprimanded him, "Rama, it is not proper for you to say that you are sacrificing this entire empire for Bharata. How can you sacrifice that which is not yours? How can you give up that which you have not received? The kingdom still belongs to Dasaratha. There is no scope for your mercy or charity here."

Dasaratha bowing his head, grumbled,

"*May your face blaze*! Sinful woman! You have made me a butt of ridicule among my people. May your family line cease! May death come to you." So cursing her and trembling, he sat.

Rama stood bowing his head. Sita's anger at her husband was over, love surged again and her eyes moistened.

Relatives and priests began to scold Kaika saying that she was sending Sita also along with Rama to the forests. Some words fell on the ears of Kaika.

Looking sharply, Kaika said, "I have not demanded that Sita also should go. Stop all that prattle." She commanded and all became silent.

Sita, in order to please all, said, "Don't worry about me! I will not desist from going along with my husband. While the feet of my husband, which I worship, wander about in the forests, how can I stay here?"

"Good! Good!" the Brahmins shouted again.

Under the aegis of Vasishta, all the priests discussed and decided that there was no need for Sita to wear loin-cloth saris, she could live in the forest with costly saris and ornaments as she used in the harem.

Dasaratha called the ministers and ordered, "Get the clothes and ornaments necessary for Sita."

Immediately all the priests estimated the number of saris required by a royal woman, for fourteen years. They turned the almanacs. Verified the auspicious days. They added festivals and holidays. They added rites and rituals. The daughter-in-law of king Dasaratha should have brand new silk saris for all functions. The figure came to more than a hundred for a year. However modestly reduced, it was inevitable to put at least forty saris a year. For fourteen years it came to 560 saris. Over that, all family women made a mountain of a pack with ornaments, cosmetics, spices, turmeric and vermillion and two pairs of loin-clothes for Rama and Lakshmana each and shields and weapons.

Sita wearing a white silk sari, ornaments all over her body and the head decked with flowers was ready for the journey.

Kausalya, who had suffered all her life with the indifference of her husband, tired of virtuousness, feeling a disgust at seeing her husband's face, drew her daughter-in-law near and began to preach principles of virtuousness of women. "Dear child! A husband is god for a woman. There is no life other than the worship of a husband for a woman. You are still young. You don't comprehend the intentions of women. Women do not have steadfast mind. It is a very bad thing. Women will slight down the more their husbands love them. If a husband becomes poor they stop treating him with respect as before and insult him. They raise a hue and cry without shame about a small mistake of the husband marrying a second wife if he fancies. Women's mind is a very crooked mind you know!" so saying, she looked with side-glances every now and then at Kaika to notice whether Kaika was sensing the taunts meant for her. Then again, she continued her sermon to her daughter-in-law. "But see that you never allow such a vile intention to come to you. Don't slight your husband, since he has lost his kingdom. You should go on worshipping him, like a god, you know!" so she preached morals and felt anxious to see if people had perceived the villainy of Kaika and her own virtue.

For any woman of a harem, spending the entire life in dependence, hate, jealousy, vanity, pomp, empty virtues, repulsive morals, buried in the womb of time devoid of any essence, at the end in old age, raising eyes without enthusiasm, the one last light that would appear was that of 'virtuousness'! That lustre of fame!

Sita saluting in reverence to her mother-in-law who had lowered her face with tears, said, "Don't compare me with the wicked women. My parents preached me the duty of virtuousness in my child hood. I shall give up my life, but not leave the feet of my husband". Saying so, she bowed to the feet of Rama.[46]

Again the harem reverberated with moans.

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46. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 39, slokas 20 to 31: In the conversation between Kausalya and Sita, we can see how women themselves believe that women are inherently bad and so on. ★

Sumantra came driving the chariot.

Losing Rama was difficult for Dasaratha. Such a man of humility, such a son who bowed and saluted a hundred times a day would go away and he would be without salutations for so many years enveloped him in sorrow. Shaking his head with a shiver, he recounted his own good qualities and wailed, "Why all this ritual of truthfulness to me? Why all this austerity of virtue? Oh! How good it would have been, if I were an untruthful man! I have become so a pious man after all!" Looking with hesitation and bashfulness at Rama, he said, "My lad! This moment is auspicious. Start. Walk carefully watching thorns and the like on the way! Conduct deeds observing the auspicious moments every time." He bent his head and shed tears. "Now without you how can I live?" He began to bemoan that it might not be possible for him to live.

Everybody plunged into despondency emotion. They gathered round the chariot with sighs and sobs with a flood of tears.

Sumantra sat in the box in the front, took the reins in his hand. Rama, Lakshmana, Sita saluted to all the elders and boarded the chariot. They arranged the bundle of clothes, swords, shields, a basket, a crow bar for digging roots and an axe on the chariot. The chariot moved. The horses, standing in the sun, swayed their heads and started running.

Dasaratha fell into the arms of the weeping maids — not having eaten any thing since the previous night.

Sumitra stood with tears in her eyes, seeing Lakshmana go.

Forgetting all the etiquette of the royal family, Kausalya cried in a loud voice. "Lad! Rama, My lad." She was about to run behind the chariots. Maids forcibly took her inside.

Kaika sitting alone in her room, wiped the tears gushing down.

People who gathered in the streets, watched regretfully the princes going away in the chariot in the attire of sages.

"Sages should walk, can they go in chariots?" somebody threw a doubt to the ears of somebody.

The chariot was going fast.

Wailing from the harem, some melancholic tunes on the lute pursued the chariot to some distance.

The auspicious moment for the coronation fixed by great scholars and those adept in astrology turned out to be the moment of 'exile in to the forest'.

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The chariot travelled till evening and reached the shore of the river *Tamasa*. The horses were exhausted. The men too felt exhausted. Rama proposed to stay there that night. Sumantra unharnessed the chariot and watered and fed the horses.

The shore of the river was calm. Far away behind the trees the sun was setting. The sun rays were falling on the waters here and there and the water shone brilliantly. The wind was blowing fragrantly touching the flowers on the branches. Birds were flying in flocks all over the sky and creating a hubbub with their varied calls.

All of them washed their feet in the river and offered salutations to the Sun.

Rama and Sita sat under a tree. Lakshmana stood at some distance bowing.

Sita looked at the flying birds and their moving shadows on the river, and smiled. Sita was without any sorrow being aware that she was beside her husband who was capable and a great hero.

Lakshmana abandoned worries the moment he prepared for the exile. Now he had no other thought except that of his duty, of service to his brother, with out any thing lacking.

Rama for himself was not able to forget all that had happened in half a day as in a dream. He bent his head with astonishment of disbelief and sorrow.

Darkness was enveloping. The tumult of the birds increased. The wind was getting cooler on the river.

Rama looked at the river, looked at the birds and said "Lakshmana! Look at that side. The river seems to be in tears, as if it were weeping. Look at this side. With the noise of the birds the forest seems to be wailing", said he, sighing that his suffering had become the suffering of Nature also.

Sita, looking at two birds couching in a nest, exulted at the innocence of her husband. "That is not wailing. They have reached their nests. All birds make noise like this in our garden also every evening", said she laughing.

Rama imagined before his eyes, his garden, the harem and the town. "Lakshmana, all our relatives may be sad. All the people may be wailing for our troubles," said he, hung his head again and sat sorrowfully.

After some time Lakshmana got up, collected all the dry leaves there and made a bed. Rama had no enthusiasm even to eat fruit. He drank some water and was ready to go to bed. Then he saw Sita. A youthful woman, laden with ornaments from top to toe. She did not pay heed to his words. He looked around. There might not be wild animals there but what was the guarantee that there were no thieves and lustful men about? She did not mind his words. How much safety there was in the harems for women! *Where even a male fly could not enter it.* Her sari over the shoulder was slipping down! Why did not she take care about it? — He looked and cautioned Sita.

Sita smiled.

"It may be cold. Take the sari around your shoulders."

"Yes, it is a bit cold', said Sita, wrapping the sari around the shoulder and couched herself like a bird.

Tears welled up in the eyes of Sumantra.

Lakshmana being unable to watching the hardships of that couple, bowed his head sadly.

Rama looked around again said, "Lakshmana! Be careful with the bundle of saris. Keep it close to us. Keep watching around every now and then." He looked at Sita again.

Rama — whom the sages praise that he could fight with 11 thousand enemy heroes while protecting himself, protecting chariots, horses and the driver — looked around, saw Sita and said to Lakshmana, "Lakshmana! It is good that you have come with us. It would have been difficult for me alone to protect Sita."

Then he lay down with a bit of confidence on the leaves.[47]

Sita looked at her husband with astonishment. Was it so difficult for her husband to protect her? What act could she do that would trouble her husband? Would she take even a single wrong step defying her husband? Had she not told him that she would never cross the line drawn by him? Was he not confident of her good conduct? — Sita bowed her head in shame. All sat there silently.

Rama rose to straighten out the bed of leaves, as they were pricking him. Sita's mind calmed down. A delicate youth who had never known any difficulty, a virtuous man about to become a king, for such a man this was a pathetic situation! Sita's heart melted with kindness. She felt eager to make her husband sleep on her lap, without his being in discomfort.

Lakshmana and Sumantra were there and she remained silent feeling shy to look that side. It did not strike her that she could make a bed on the leaves taking four saris from the bundle. She had the eagerness to serve her husband, but never had she done anything for anybody. She had no knowledge of serving.

Rama adjusted the leaves and was reminded of his sandal wood couches, silky beds, smooth pillows and curtains, "Lakshmana, now you should not think about home and hearth and comforts! We are sages. We should live like sages...Have you kept that bundle of saris close? There are ornaments in it also. Keep watching around for a bit. Some how if day dawns one day of our exile will be over. It will be enough if 13 years 11 months and 29 days are spent." So saying, he turned to Sita's side and lay down— to be on the safe side.

After feeling sure that his brother had fallen asleep Lakshmana keeping close the bundle of saris, sat talking with Sumantra. "At last to this day misfortune is the lot of elder brother. What has our father recognized of his good nature? I told my elder brother to get the coronation done daringly, in a number of ways. But what was the use? His good qualities are his. See, how he sleeps on the ground! I am helpless to do anything except seeing him suffer," saying this he shed tears profusely.

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[47] **Aranya kanda, sarga 46, sloka 9:** They had not even crossed the Kosala kingdom and it had already become a problem for Rama to protect Sita! He gathered courage remembering that his brother was present to help him.

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Rama lay down on the leaves, but sleep eluded him. The eyes would not close; the bed of leaves was terribly uncomfortable. The stalks of the leaves were pricking him like thorns. Red ants were crawling all over the body. When shaken from one side, they crept on him from the other side. *Hunger in the belly.* Had not eaten anything since night. No coronation. Nothing except fasting, keeping awake, meditation and prayers which were unavoidable ...Wicked bird — the yellow wattle lapwing, how it squeaked! What more harm can it do? It did all that could be done. Oh! What is this, some ant hill? Because sages praise, 'Rama had great self-control, he would treat pain and pleasure alike, he was above worldly pleasure or pain', Rama too thought that that must be true and hence he reclined to sleep again. But...at that moment he jumped and shook off more ants. "Obeying the command of father seems to be somewhat difficult", he could not but admit it during the very first night. He shook his shoulders, "There would be no problem even if there were lions there, it would be better if there were no ants", thought he with irritation and reclined again.

★ ★ ★

Sumantra harnessed the chariot even before it was dawn. Sita reclined on the bundle of saris with sleepy indolence. Lakshmana was guarding Sita and the bundle whole night, so when the chariot was moving, he fell asleep in that cool breeze.

Rama was attentively looking at the Kosala kingdom he was leaving, the villages and its people, he sat talking word by word with Sumantra.

The day was dawning in the east. The sky was a bit cloudy. In that pleasant cool breeze the horses ran enthusiastically.

People were seen here and there with yokes, ploughs and *sticks for brushes for their teeth.* Rama was earnestly trying to listen to what they were saying. Amid the din of the chariot's squeaking of wheels, trampling hooves —

"Brother-in-law, will you give me a cigar"?

"At night the stupid cow broke off the tether! Where she has gone one wonders. Should look out for it if it has gone into the fields"

"Have you sown the green gram this year?"

"My woman asked for cow dung to sprinkle dung water in the front yard. I have come up in this chill weather." Such sort of ordinary conversation of the people reached his ears. Nobody was aware of Rama's exile, it seemed.

Sadly shaking his head, Rama said, "These commoners do not care for any worldly affairs."

The chariot was going on the dirt road by the side of the fields. All around all the fields had been ploughed. The entire land was ready to offer grain harvest with kindness, *like a mother feeding her breast milk to an infant.*

Loud cries were coming from the fields here and there depending on the course of the wind. Some were talking with others in the neighboring fields aloud. Some in other fields were ploughing and crying aloud.

Rama said to Sumantra, "Drive the chariot slowly. We can go along looking at the beauty of these fields" He looked around.

Sumantra drew back the reins and reduced the speed of the horses.

One farmer shouted in a loud voice, "Have you heard, Yenkanna? Yesterday there was a huge hue and cry in the king's place."

"How have you come to know?"

"Last night somebody going by on a horse said so! Do you think that I am a liar? King Dasaratha wanted to give the kingdom to the eldest son. The youngest queen, opposed it tooth and nail. Moreover, she asked for the exile of the eldest one to the forests. See! How terrible! Throughout the night I could not get a wink of sleep. My woman continuously wept…"

"Your woman always weeps, what is new in it? There is a lot of real gossip. I'll tell you, listen. The kingdom is the right of Bharata originally. While marrying Kaika, the old man had promised that he would give the kingdom to her son. Then, do you feel it is right for the elder king to go back on his word? The same question Kaika had put to him and demanded a reply, and he turned pale, they said".

"How do you know all these things?"

"My eldest son went to Ayodhya yesterday. He returned at midnight and told me every thing."

"I see, but even then will she exile Rama to the forests, he who has been so delicately brought up? Do you think Rama is a cattle herder like us *who does things like mixing dung*? Why do you talk without sense?'

"Who does not have sense? When he digs pits behind the throne, what can they do except banish from the kingdom? She demanded her boons, what was wrong in it when he had promised her boons, should he give her the boons or not?"

Another voice: "What? Did the old king give her boons? He is a great king, so he gave them. A man like me cannot even get a sari for my wife."

"Yeah, he gave great boons!"

Men in the fields gathering at a spot started a discussion and were divided into two parties.

From a distance one farmer angrily scolded every one, "The hell with you! Look at that side. The sun has gone up in the sky. What is that gossip without doing work. What does it matter if Rama becomes king? Or Bharata becomes king? Or Pullayya becomes king? Will any king let us off without collecting taxes? …Eh, Pullayya! Come here"…Why should we bother about these big people?

Rama turned his face away and hurried Sumantra, "Drive fast. We have to reach the shore of the Ganges."

The chariot reached the boundaries of the Kosala kingdom gaining speed and crossing villages, towns, small woods and rivers. Rama had the chariot stopped and looked at the Kosala kingdom with devotion and affection.

Kosala is a very beautiful kingdom with wealth and riches, towns, sacrificial altars, cattle, gardens, forests and rivers. Kosala is a country endowed with riches and places necessary for a king to enjoy many luxuries. The eldest sons of the royal family had been ruling Kosala for many years. Now thinking about the changes that had come about, Rama felt very sorry and turned to Kosala and saluted it, "O! Kosala kingdom! Oh! Ayodhya town! I am the eldest son of king Dasaratha,. Leaving you I am going away to the forests. After fourteen years I shall come again and see you. Don't forget me", he prayed.

The chariot continued its journey. By dusk it reached the shore of the Ganges near Sringaberapuram.

Sumantra stopped the chariot under a huge tree with green sprouting and full blossom. All got off the chariot, bathed and performing the evening prayers sat under the tree to rest.

The cool breeze flowed on the river. The vast Gangetic shore was full of trees and shone brilliantly. Flowers that had dropped under the tree for a long time were *high like pails*. New flowers were *opening eyes full* on the branches. The river, with flowering plants on the shore, was charming like a woman who has decorated flowers on the sides of the cheeks. A variety of birds were clamouring and were alighting on the shore in swarms. Dipping their beaks in the water were flying on to the trees. At a distance a deer came to the shore with its calf. Sita looked joyfully when the deer calf frolicked about spraying water.

Rama narrated the story of the river to Sita, "This great river takes birth in Vaikuntha at the feet of Vishnu, then falls into the matted locks of Siva and reaches the nether world. It has been flowing in the three worlds right from the beginning of creation. Even the gods bathe in this river and cleanse their sins."

Sita — with the nature of women who believe with minds open, whatever lies, whatever exaggerations and whatever myths their husbands tell them — believed the words of her husband with great devotion. " My husband knows so many things! He is so learned" so pleased was she.

The Ganges — taking birth in the mountains by rains, making the plains fertile, quenching the thirst of all creatures for many hundreds of years, receiving millions of salutations with folded hands and the thankful looks of moist eyes of innumerable creatures — was like the innocent Sita, who did not know anything.

The deer calf frolicking in the water, looked frightened as its mother drank water and was going into the midst of trees and ran after it in a hurry.

Lakshmana gathering the ripened leaves, enquired of the people going that way about Guha.

Guha was the king of that small area. All the people there belonged to the Boya tribe and Guha of the Boya tribe knew the Kosala king and his sons. On learning that king Dasaratha's sons had come there, Guha feeling glad came there with servants. His servants brought a large variety of eatables, fruits, drinks, beds and couches for resting on.

Guha on hearing what had happened, with great sorrow, getting agitated, with rustic affection surging, embraced Rama with tears in eyes. "Oh! My boy! *Am I different from your father?* Don't grieve that the Kosala Empire is lost. You can rule my kingdom. I shall live by serving you", said he and looked on with the satisfaction of having consoled the son of a great king.

Rama sighed solemnly. Rama knew that, though Guha had spoken in that manner at the stroke of learning the news of his difficulties out of his duty of friendship with his father, it was only a formal expression. Would any king, however small might be his kingdom give it up? Would he pass on his authority to some other person? Yet, could the sorrow of losing the Kosala kingdom abounding in riches and wealth be compensated with a Boya kingdom that was *not even as big as ten full extended arm lengths*? Rama shook his head sadly and began to talk with Guha.

"We are very glad that you have come to serve us on hearing about our condition. Kshatriyas (Royal families) should give to others and not take anything from others. One should be in a position to donate and not in a position of taking charity. Kshatriyas should gather wealth and riches by their heroism… It seems you have brought many delicious dishes for us to eat, but I don't eat anything. I have no attachment for sleep or food. What else is there for me than to obey my father's command? What is the use of wailing? Except meditating and taking roots and herbs like sages, why do I need all these delicacies, pleasures and mundane things? Do not worry about me. What is the news? Are there no turmoils in your kingdom? Are all your kith and kin well? Does your money increase day by day? A king should watch first his treasury." Rama, who had not even touched the crown, preached politics and subtleties of duty to the old king who had been ruling for many years. Guha did not pay heed to any of them. He was grieving not able to recover from the news of Rama's exile. "Eat at least the fruits, my boy!" said he again.

Rama turned his face rejecting the offer and said, "No, I do not want anything. Except the water of the Ganges I do not touch anything. Look there! Those horses belong to my father. Attend to them. That itself is worshipping me", saying this he looked solemn. It was Rama's belief that every one would worship him.

Guha felt belittled. When he was affectionately conversing with him, why did Rama say 'worshipping'? "Hey, give milk to those horses," he ordered his servants.

The fragrance of the dishes which Guha brought, was wafting in the air around out doing the scents of flowers. The delicious aroma of the meat dishes were floating in the air.

Rama turned his face to the Ganges, dilated his nostrils and smacked his lips. For three nights he touched nothing except plain water. Never had he suffered so much hunger since his birth. Where had all that heroism gone? Weakness was creeping on. "Lakshmana! Get water from the Ganges!" he grumbled and leant against the tree weakly.

Lakshmana brought water in a leaf cup and gave it to Rama. "Brother, Sir, Take rest", he showed the heap of leaves.

Drinking water, Rama reclined with weakness. "Lakshmana! This is the second night in exile. If we still spend 13 years 11 months and 28 days, it is enough. Buck up.... Is that bundle tight? I hope no ornament has slipped out,?" so saying he examined the bundle.

Lakshmana saluted and said, "Yes! Sir, By your grace, none has slipped out, Brother!"

Since her husband had not eaten, Sita too had not eaten anything. She took some water and dropped off reclining on the bundle.

Sumantra had had all the foodstuffs which Guha brought to his heart's content and comfortably slept there.

Lakshmana did not take even water and began pouring out his grief to Guha, "See! Has ever such a terrible thing happened in this world? The great man who was to become a king yesterday, sleeps now on the ground. Look at that Mother Sita. Has she stepped feet on the ground? How long still do I have to see this horrible thing!" he sighed heavily.

Guha was listening to him sympathetically with a lot of affection. "Tsk, tsk...tsk," he choked in sympathy *making the noise with tongue touching the palate and listened to him smacking his lips.*

"My father got us by performing sacrifices and rituals.... What was the use? Finally he has put his eldest son in this plight." Lakshmana wiped his tears.

Making heavy sounds with the tongue in sympathy, Guha said, "How terrible! How terrible!"

Waving his hands about, Lakshmana said, "What else could even he do? He was trapped in a woman's hands. Otherwise he is fond of our brother. He cried sorrowfully and profusely while we were leaving. How will he survive in this old age with so much grief? After he is gone the entire earth will be widowed. None of our mothers will be able to live. Even the people — How will they live? Now if you go to Ayodhya and see, except Kaika none else will be alive. The whole town becomes dark, cats and owls may be hovering about there. We do not have the fortune to be present to see to the good and the bad when father dies. We will not have the fortune of performing his funeral rites." Lakshmana began to shed tears.

Guha got agitated, stopped the sounds in the mouth, bent forward and asked, "Has any news of king Dasaratha's demise come, my boy."

Lakshmana blew his nose to his left and wiping the fingers on the *dhoti,* said, "Should any news be specially known? Can he survive still? No. He may have passed away. We are not fortunate enough to see father in his last moments". He started shedding tears in a gush.

"Control yourself, my boy, control yourself! Your father may not have died, control yourself! I felt glad that it would be more convenient to me if Rama had become the king. Mine is the neighbouring state! What will be the attitude of Bharata? Do you think he will create any troubles?... Don't worry, my boy. Something will happen. Go to sleep. My men and I watch on. It doesn't matter if people like us do not have food and sleep. Whereas you are born in a royal family. It is not proper that you undergo such difficulties. Lie down till the day dawns." Guha consoled Lakshmana for a long time.[48]

Lakshmana could not get sleep. His eyes become dry. His heart was getting calmer while talking to Guha. 'After crossing the river and entering the forest, who will appear that is familiar?' he wondered. He was looking at the bundle and Sita every now and then and continued talking for a long time. Guha was waiting to light a cigar after Lakshmana had slept. But there seemed no hope for it that night.

Rama was lying down, but there was no sleep. He was listening to all Guha and Lakshmana were talking about. *Belly was*

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48. In these words, we can observe how greatly and respectfully the lower caste people treat the higher caste people. Women believe that 'the mind of women is base', lower castes people believe that 'it doesn't matter if the lower caste people suffer'. All this indicates how firmly those beliefs were deep rooted. ★

shrinking from hunger. The ears were resounding like crickets. Darkness was enveloping them alike whether their eyes were closed or opened. The bed of leaves was not suitable for him. 'The soft beds and spicy dishes which Guha brought were there on that side. But…what is this weakness?' he felt. Can't I conquer my soul?" That there was no god other than father…in the Vedas…Oh!" He started and got up dusting the leaves on his back.

Some locusts fell on Lakshmana. Lakshmana was startled and shook them off his hand. The locust fell on the leaves and frowned its face, thinking, "What sort of brothers are these…Acting funny…."

Everybody was awake till midnight. They got to sleep in the early hours before dawn.

Birds rose, went about hopping, crossing chirping, what was that goodness? They jumped about since the moment of rising up. No salutation to the Sun, no oblations, no study of the Vedas, no sacrificial rituals. Still for how many generation would they go on taking rebirth like that in this mean world chirping, jumping from twig to twig on wings without seeking the path of salvation?

Sita shivered in sleep due to the cool breeze of the river. One cuckoo was cooing near by and another was responding to it from a distance — what words were they? Peacock cries were coming from somewhere! With the wind blowing, flowers were falling with a soft sound and some on the people sleeping there.

The sun came out peeping from behind the trees wondering, "What horrible things will I see today!" The shadows of the trees grew tenfold and spread across the river.

When Rama woke up with the light falling on his eyes, Sita was picking up flowers on the shore of the river. She had had her bath. The sari that she had kept under the trees for drying was filled with flowers. Rama, after answering nature calls, bathed in the river and performed salutations to the sun.

Guha again got fresh fruits and requested Rama to eat them.

Looking solemnly, Rama said, "As per the order of my father, I *do not touch* anything except plain water till I enter the forests." He looked the fruits and turned his head away. Guha did not feel it proper that Rama should obey his father's dictates to the limit of not even eating fruits. He requested him again but in vain, felt very sorry for this plight but praised Rama, "My boy! These are not difficulties that should befall a man like you so virtuous. Your family will endure in this world", he praised.

Rama felt so happy as if *his belly was full with satisfaction*. If people praised him like that every day, he felt that he could live without food for any number of years. He felt shame that he suffered yielding to hunger.

The boat, for ferrying them across the Ganges, is ready. The bundle of saris, shields and swords and all were carried into the boat.

Sumantra stood before Rama, sorrowfully. Rama said with a smile, "Driving the chariot reach home fast. Convey the news of our safety to father. Convey our *salutes* to all our mothers and specially to our step-mother Kaika. She is a very virtuous woman. Tell her that I am executing her demands very gladly." So saying he looked calm. On seeing such a calm and clean face of Rama, everybody's hearts there melted.

"What difficulties there are for such a dutiful man!" said Guha and had tears in his eyes.

Sumantra felt awfully sorrowful to leave the princes, brought up with so much affection and fondness and that delicate lady on the shore of the Ganges. Looking at Rama affectionately, he said, "My boy, you have grown up right from your childhood with good conduct. You have studied all the Vedas, you have observed austerities and the prescribed codes. For such a man like you, it is a pity that this hardship has befallen you. Now I feel that no piousness comes to people from studying all these Vedas and virtues." Sumantra expressed doubt.

Rama felt much perturbed — that he wouldn't get piety from all the things that he had believed in all these years! No kingdom on the one hand and no piety on the other hand — Oh, that! Rama felt angry also at Sumantra. "Should an aged man like you too talk like this? Should you doubt the code which the sages set up long ago? Holy lands and fame will come to those who face hardship. For that matter what is there in pleasures, except all delusion...." Rama said with an inner hesitation.

On seeing the self control and courage of Rama, Sumantra felt relieved. "All right my boy! I have talked a lot out of my worry for your welfare. I know that your fame will spread to all the worlds", he said and felt satisfied.

Rama had confidence by then that his fame could spread to other worlds. He began to speak solemnly, "Sumantra! Tell my father that I am spending my exile without worry. Tell him particularly that I am not regretting for giving up the kingdom. Tell him not to worry even a little bit for us..... He has grown old. Has not lost lust for women. Look after him. Tell him that I want him to bring Bharata back soon and have his coronation. Bharata may turn down the offer to accept the kingdom. Tell Bharata that I have said that father's word has to be obeyed. Tell my mother as my word that she should serve Bharata attentively. A king becomes big by riches and not by age. By seeing Bharata sitting on the throne decorated with all insignia of Royalty and with the crown shining brilliantly on his head, you may not feel this grief. You might as well forget me now." Rama remarked jocularly making an insinuation to Sumantra.

Sumantra not able to sense the sarcasm in Rama's words, felt light of heart on seeing Rama laugh.

Rama felt ashamed of his own ironical attitude that Sumantra might sense negative remarks about Bharata, changed his attitude and said solemnly, "Sumantra, you have to serve Bharata as you wanted to serve me! He is also a king Dasaratha's son, born in the Raghu dynasty. All of you should conduct yourselves to please him. Kings are unwilling to suffer defeats and sorrows. They wish to fulfil all their desires and achieve all the attempts they make without any hurdle. That is why they dream of ruling kingdoms. It is different with a sage like me. I have no infatuation at all for these worldly desires!" Rama said dispassionately.

"Yes, yes, my boy! Since we are ordinary people we fall into the delusions of pleasures and pains. You...You..." so saying Sumantra saluted Rama with folded hands.

Said Rama to Guha, "Get some Banyan tree milk! I have to braid my hair." Guha sent two men. "This gentleman is asking for something. Get it", he told his men.

Sita felt disturbed when Rama spoke of matting his hair. She looked at her husband with agitation. His fine hair, which was black and thick, grown like soft silk thread with daily oil baths would be matted now. There were the sweet moments of that hair touching her cheeks in the bed room in solitude! There were many memories of adjusting that hair with her fingers in the garden in the moonshine! Sita looked into the face of Rama perturbed as if she were asking, "Don't you remember all that?" Sita never spoke to her husband in front of strangers. She saw him alarmed.

The men who went to collect banyan leaves stripped the leaves and collected some sticky milk and feathers of birds. "Are there banyan trees in Ayodhya or not? Why should he knot his hair here?" so discussing and reasoning, they returned.

As Rama and Lakshmana were getting ready to apply glue with feathers to the hair, Sita spontaneously dissuaded Rama, "No."

Rama saw amazed.

Said Sita blushing, "It will not look good."

Rama turned pale and asked, "What?"

Picking up courage never seen before and entreating with her eyes, Sita said, "My lord! Let the hair stay like it is. What is wrong in it?"

"Why? For this body and hair why is any refinement necessary?"

"What refinement is there? It is only a bath in the river! Are there regulations even for one's natural beauty?"

Rama got very angry. In front of other men...Royal woman...What was this argument with her husband?...It is All right since all are of the hunters' (Boya) tribe... if not...He looked solemnly at his wife, "You know, it is the order of the sages!"

With a desire for her husband's handsomeness, Sita daringly said with a smile, "The beauty of the body should die down by an inherent detachment, but will it not amount to renunciation to get it matted by applying glue? Who else is a better sage than the one who came away abandoning all worldly pleasures?" She looked at him devotedly.

It did not strike Rama what he ought to do. He too was unwilling to apply all the glue to the hair. But having made so much preparation, should he follow a woman's word in front of all those men! How shameful it would be! That was the evil deed his father had done! If some sages questioned him tomorrow how infamous it will be! Should he say 'my wife objected to this?' How disrepute it would be!

Rama looked at Sita somewhat harshly and said, "You are a woman. What knowledge do you have in this regard of virtue or sin? I am following the code of erstwhile sages." He hauled up Lakshmana to the fore part and quickly smeared the gum on his hair.

Guha too did not like this smearing of gum. "Why a sage like make-up for Lakshmana also, my boy", he wanted to say, but he hesitated and kept mum. When all the Boyas, not comprehending the greatness of the sages, were looking quizzically, Rama smeared the gum on to his hair also. By then, he had achieved the great satisfaction of observing a high virtue of rejecting a woman's word.

Sita leant against the branch of a tree and turned her face towards the river. Tears welled up in her eyes and were about to drop on her cheeks. Suddenly she wiped off the tear-drops with the tip of her finger nails and controlled herself. She remembered how bad it is to feel sorry for any action of one's husband and felt ashamed at her behaviour. She hid her face for some time, got rid of the sorrow in heart, and looked at Rama with an unenthusiastic smile.

Rama's curly hair, which used to move in the breeze and fall on his cheeks was now bound by gum and dried up banyan milk, got matted on the head looking like an earthen pot turned upside down.

If she looked at Lakshmana's head — There was another pot! Sita sighed and looked towards the river.

As Banyan milk that fell on the neck and left ear caused itching, Lakshmana stood scratching himself with a small stick. Rama, knowing the technique of smearing it without dropping it, from the experience of applying it to Lakshmana, was able to smear it on himself without milk touching his skin.

When this business was over, Guha hurried them, "My boy! The boat is ready. You have not eaten anything here. Going quickly to the forests, it is better to munch something." He said sadly.

"Lakshmana! The bundle of saris...."

"Yes, brother sir, I have loaded it in the boat."

Rama looked at the boat and said to Lakshmana, "Well, first help Sita on board! The boat is steady. There is no fear. It is All right. Board it heroically." So saying, he stood unmoving.

Lakshmana held the plank to board fast, helped Sita board it first and he boarded and stood afar from Sita.

Rama walking near the boat said to Sumantra the same words which he had said earlier, "Tell my father that I am not regretful of losing the kingdom. Tell him again and again that I shall spend my exile with pleasure....I am very glad of your devotion to the king. Now you can go back", he praised Sumantra's devotion. To Guha who was tearful, Rama said, "Be careful with your kingdom. It is very difficult to protect kingdoms, you see! Develop the *Chaturangabala,* the four wings of the army. See, your treasury should be full, you know! You have to fortify your hill forts from the attack of enemies! We must be watchful of the things happening in the country without let up...So the boat will not sway?" Rama still stood near the plank.

Guha felt slighted a bit with Rama reminding him of how to rule the kingdom so many times ignoring his age. The next moment, seeing Rama about to go to the forest life, pity overwhelmed him. "Board it, boy!" said he, with a hoarse voice.

Rama, closing his eyes, reciting the cant relating to 'Boarding the Boat', heroically boarded the boat that was steady unwavering, from the plank held fast by Boya men and stood bravely beside the people who stood not knowing any cant.

In some ancient time primeval human beings, while setting out on journey across water, might have prayed to the Forces of Nature to help them succeed in their venture, and that prayer had become a 'cant' for Rama.

The Boya men pushed the boat into the water and crawling like fish on the edges, took the oars into their hands. Within no time the boat sailed into the middle of the river, away from them all from the shore.

Guha and Sumantra watched the boat again and again from the bank and turned back to go home.

"Sumantra, sir! If he becomes the king, he will rule very well" said Guha, unable to bear his grief that Rama had told him so many times how to rule his kingdom.

Sumantra's face blossomed like a lotus leaf. "Guha, tell me, has my loyalty to the king become known just today? I have been serving king Dasaratha much before these children were born. Look, this man says, 'I am happy at your devotion to the king!" I am so elderly! Is it something which he should mention now?" Sumantra said *flinging back his head* in protest.

"Forget it Sumantra, sir! He is in great trouble. He is like our child."

"Yeah, yeah! I too thought the same. Nay, he never used to speak so much before."

"However much I asked him, he has not eaten even a single fruit. I don't know what sort of a vow it is, *let that vow go to hell*!"

"Leave it be, his days have changed so! Guha, I will go now! Look that side! The boat has disappeared!"

Sumantra's chariot returned home slowly.

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The clear waters all around, with the sun rays falling straight on them, glow as though gold has melted and is flowing. The lustre of the waves reflected on the faces of all has slipped down like waves. In the sky so clear birds — one here and another there — flew at a great height. The trees on the shore appeared to be tiny like blades of grass.

The boat swayed slowly.

The course of the wind was favourable to the boat. The oarsmen could not contain their enthusiasm and commenced the song addressing the Mother Ganges.[49]

Whenever the wind blew, the broken skin on the left ear of Lakshmana itched. As he had not found a stick, he rubbed it with his *dhoti,* the lower garment.

Sita rejoiced on seeing so much water and saluted the river with folded hands. "Mother Ganges! After completing my exile in the forest and returning and getting our kingdom back, I shall offer you a worship with meat and liquor.[50]

After visiting all the holy places along your shore, again I shall make grants of land, cows, and clothing to Brahmins. Bestow your grace on us kindly, mother, so that the fourteen years go by safely and we return to Ayodhya joyfully!" Sita prayed to the Ganges, made a 'vow'. Sita gained confidence abundantly that Mother

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[49] In the stories that we commonly hear, they say that Guha himself acted as an oarsman. But it is not true. Guha had only sent his men and he did not go along with Rama. ★

[50] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 52, slokas 86 to 88:** What sort of ideas did Rama and Sita had concerning the kingdom while going to the forest! Based on Sita's promise of worship which she would fulfil after getting back the kingdom, after completing the exile, it is clear that they started to the forest with a view that they would get back the kingdom again. What is the basis for their view? 'Fourteen years of exile in the forest' — does this mean that there is any condition that the kingdom will go to Rama after the completion of exile? No, there was no such condition. The kingdom always belonged to Bharata. After completing the exile period, Rama can come back and live in the country. That's all. But, Sita always prayed, "We should get back our kingdom!" And Rama felt happy at her prayers. If he wished to take back the kingdom, how will it mean that he is obeying his father's command? ★

Ganges would bestow grace surely. Rama's face glowed with new joy.

Rama seeing Sita make a vow, looked as if he appreciated her action.

But…that pleasure did not last for long. A tide of anxiety rose. 'Will I have the right to take back the kingdom after fourteen years? It was not the wish of Kaika, was it? It was her wish that the kingdom should belong to Bharata alone, wasn't it? She demanded exile for me in order that Bharata establish himself as the king, didn't she? — How clever she was! What if she were a woman? There are so many wicked people even among women! How shall I get the kingdom any day? — I don't know, what will happen! Who knows the deeds of fate? If I bear this for fourteen years….?' His anxiety gradually receded.

Sita leaning against the edge of the boat looking at the waves felt a sudden doubt. She thought about it for some time, bending her head, not able to decide either way, looked at her husband hesitantly and fell into a dilemma, 'Should I ask him or not?'.

As he was gracious, Rama asked her, "What do you want? Drinking water?" He was about to call, "Lakshmana."

Sita waved to him not to call Lakshmana. With hesitation, she raised her head a bit and asked, "My Lord…I have a small doubt." She lowered her head.

"Come on, Sita! Why do you fear?"

Sita lifted her head a bit. "I prayed to Goddess Ganga asking for our kingdom, back. But even after our return, how will that Kosala kingdom come back to us? Is it not your father's wish that Bharata should be the king forever? He has not told you to take back the kingdom again after the exile, has he? You are a man following your father's order to the letter. Then what is the use of my praying to the Goddess Ganga?" She uttered those couple of words and lowered her head worrying about the kingdom.

Rama didn't utter a word. Sita could express clearly aloud that doubt which had been fermenting him from the troubling. There is no problem with regard to the life of exile for fourteen years. But what after that? He expected that his father at the conclusion of his conversation would say, "After return you take the kingdom." But he had no such intention of that. Then, Bharata should be the king forever? His return from exile meant the completion of his punishment and permission to live his life in Ayodhya again. Except that, it did not mean taking the kingdom again. The kingdom belonged to Bharata forever. Then the idea was that he should live under the grace of Bharata and his authority? For this much grace, what was the need to come back? Why be exiled for fourteen years? A full hundred years… there… living in the forests and dying there would be better.

Rama felt unable to bear this thought and turned his face to the other side.

Sita was looking agitated whether she would have the luck of visiting all the holy places along the bank of the Ganges and fulfilling her vows. Rama turned this side after some time. His face became cloudy. "Sita! You are a woman! Why do you need the discussion of justice and injustice. Things happen as per the directions of Brahmins and priests", said Rama. The last words came out involuntarily as if somebody had preached in his soul. Yes, won't the Brahmins decide justly? Won't the sages stand by him? He had to live in the forests anyway, so he should curry the favour of the sages during this period. Rama bucked up greatly and felt glad. His face blossomed.

Feeling hurt by the words of her husband, Sita turned her face towards the river and stood looking at the waves.

Lakshmana got hold of a stick from somewhere and scratched his neck.

By midday the boat reached the other shore. The entire shore was flat with sand all around. The sun was fierce. The sand was glittering brightly like planed gold.

The boatmen carrying all the bundles of saris, swords, bows, arrows, sheaths, shields, basket and crow-bars — crossed over the sand and placed them under trees.

Rama, Lakshmana and Sita got off the boat and gathered under the trees.

Rama said to the boatmen solemnly, "I am very glad for your service. May you will get grain and riches." So saying, he blessed them lifting his hand.

They looked at each other's face. They are so poor that they can't feed themselves unless they work very hard daily. It was incomprehensible for them how would this Banyan milk man's waving hand get them the grain and riches. "We shall go, sir!" They saluted and turned back.

Rama turned his head and surveyed around. It was so thick that the sun rays were hardly piercing through. Except the trees and the howling of the wind all was quiet every where around. Rama got suspicious of some thing suddenly, called the boatmen back and asked, "Look here, Are there any lions or tigers and the like here?"

"No, sir! No body has reported to have seen them. Yet, we don't hunt, sir! We are employed under the king", they said, rejoicing greatly for their jobs.

"Well, you can take leave. If tigers or suchlike are there I intend to kill them now. That is why, I asked about."

The boatmen saluted again and ran off hurriedly to the boat fearing that this Banyan milk man might call them again. They pushed the boat into the water, jumped into it like birds. Within no time the boat was far away.

They stood, under the trees near the waters, in the midst of the forest with no other human being and watched the boat going afar. Then some sorrow or worry, which was not comprehensible to themselves even, enveloped the three. Each one remembered the hard vows they had made.

For Rama — Obeying the command of his father!

For Lakshmana — Obeying the word of his Brother!

For Sita -- Conjugal fidelity to her husband!

The Boya men having no truthful vows singing joyfully with full throat were going away from the forests towards their homes and people.

Sita looked at her husband naively. Lakshmana, making straight the voice that was getting heavy, said, "Brother, sir, what command?" and bent.

Rama's mind was somewhat agitated, without courage and somewhat beyond grasp. He was very agitated and felt like calling back the boat men with the sounds of claps. He looked at the river. The boat that was visible till then was entirely out of sight.

Rama surveyed around, shouldered the bow and tied the sword to his girdle. "Lakshmana! We have reached the forests. See, you should be guarding both of us. I have never seen these forests before. How they might be further on! Be careful, There will be no use of regretting later. Do not be unmindful of us thinking that there are people here! You should be watchful alike in every place with or without people. Hey, hold the sword first. Let us walk a little slowly. Saying so, Rama looked around.[51]

All the goods which the boat men had unloaded were under the tree. "How shall we carry all these?" Rama had a justifiable doubt then. While receiving them there was no idea of reaching them to the other side except the exultation that father was giving them.

Rama frowned and cogitated for long. Would no virtue make it possible for the bundle to fly? I have read all the Vedas. Made many gifts and donations. So much filial devotion...Monogamy...By the by, can Sita make the bundle fly with her virtuousness, shall I ask her? Or will she remark, "You are more powerful than me, lord!" — 'That also is true', Rama felt. She has only one asset of devotion to her husband but for him there were many, weren't there? They were obeying his father's command, following truthfulness, monogamy and many more. He had to command with his power. He looked at the bundle solemnly. Immediately, he closed his eyes and he ordered in his mind as though he received some incantation, "Oh, bundle of saris! Swords! Shields! I am Sri Ramachandra endowed with the divine spirit, an incomparable follower of father's word on this earth! The sages daily laud me! I am such a gifted man, I command you to float in the sky and follow us! Eh, start"

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[51] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 52, sloka 94:** Rama, without moving at least one step after stepping off from the boat, handed over valorously the responsibility of protecting him and Sita to Lakshmana. It is Rama's order that Lakshmana should protect them not only at places where there are no people but also at places where there are people! See in Rama's orders the same kind of ordering when a slave-master assigns some work to his slave! The relationship between Rama and Lakshmana is not like a bond between two brothers but like a Master-Slave relationship. This fact will become clearer as we proceed.

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That bundle lay like a mountain without any sort of hesitation. The swords did not move, neither did the shields. It seems they do not know what Rama was!

"What? My command has no power?" — Rama began to doubt himself but could not believe it. On the pretext of driving away the birds on the trees, he lifted the basket and flung it high. The bundle fell down with a thud. By then, Rama realised what the actual situation was. That no powers would work out when Fate was haunting him. Then what about the bundle? Should we leave it there. Otherwise who will carry it? — He turned his face towards the river as though he was not concerned and stood looking at the river.

Lakshmana deeply thought for some time, unfolded the bundle, put the shields and arms in it and tied it again. He flung the bow on the shoulders, quiver of arrows on the back and sword at the waist. Hesitating for a while placed the bundle on his head. Held the basket and crow-bar in hand.[52]

Seeing Lakshmana in that state, Sita's heart melted. Tears rolled from her eyes. From the beginning Sita was sorry that Lakshmana was coming along with them leaving his wife and comforts behind. "Oh! You carry the bundle like an attendant? Aren't you a prince, my boy!" felt she sorrowfully like a mother with affection surging.

If said that Rama and Lakshmana were the sons of a king, why about onlookers, they (the brothers) themselves were not in a situation to believe that. Rama felt that all the power from his body had vanished when the glittering silk dress, diamond ornaments and decorations were removed. The moment the insignia of kingship departed, all the solemnity from the face went out. There, in that chamber, when Brahmins were lauding him in front of his father, enthusiasm came to him and he felt that some brilliance had remained, but while coming away abandoning Ayodhya, abandoning all hope and deprived of the kingdom, the power of one's own place disappeared, the power of decoration disappeared, governing the attendants and slaves had disappeared, the power of riches had disappeared, all kinds of power vanished and the whole power of his soul disappeared. The very first night after leaving all the royal luxuries, when Rama slept on the ground and while shaking off the ants from his back, there was a doubt in Rama's mind whether he was actually "the Sri Rama lauded by the sages." Sometimes Rama felt that he would like to ask a sage, if he came across one: "My lord! Kindly tell me who am I?"

In the past the need to be angry was rare for him. The attendants served him dutifully. The priests and ministers behaved with

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52. Before Rama started on his exile in the forest, Dasaratha had given saris, ornaments and cosmetics to Sita; shields, weapons, basket, a crow-bar and much more — this fact we know. In the original story, there are details about arranging them in the chariot and shifting them into the boat while crossing the river Ganga. But, there is no mention in the story how all those articles reached the forest. The poet cleverly left this point without any mention. Then, who carried those articles? It is very natural if anybody asks this question. Was there any other way than for Lakshmana to carry them?

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humility and obedience thinking that he was the future king. There were prayers and appeals all around from the people. Where had all of them gone? During these two or three days he felt angry many a time. The joy he used to feel formerly seeing Sita and Lakshmana was now absent. Rama was amazed at his own mental state. With unending thoughts, he had felt unbearably impatient. Darkness enveloped the eyes from weakness. Not even moving a step forward, he saw Lakshmana.

Rama felt glad on seeing Lakshmana, with the bundle on head and arranging all the remaining things on his body. Lakshmana had come only to serve him, hadn't he? Is it not the duty of the servant to serve attentively and protect the master always? Rama could carry that basket and crow-bar. But Rama is Lord Rama, isn't he?

To Lakshmana — who held the bundle firmly with his left hand lest it fall and the basket and the crow-bar in the right hand as he was about to move on waiting for the command of his brother — Rama said, "Lakshmana! You see you must protect us! Walk ahead. Sita will follow you. Don't fear. I shall walk behind. I shall protect you from the rear." He permitted Lakshmana to move.[53]

Sita looked at her husband in surprise. "In forests protectors should walk ahead and if they walk in the rear how can they protect others? The rear is already safe with our walk?" She felt like asking. She could not pick up courage to ask Rama, looking at his seriousness.

While his neck was sinking with the weight of the bundle, Lakshmana went ahead.

Behind him was Sita!

And behind her was Rama — with courage! With the confidence that there was no threat for him. They walked along the shore under the trees.

Reflecting about it, Rama felt that it was a very good arrangement.

It was better to have his wife in sight. It was the custom of the world too! One can't avoid fear of slander, can one?

The thought caused him a bit of anger at Sita. "See! You have not heeded for my word, Sita! What comfort is there for you in walking? It may be well for men like us, but who knows what more is in store? How many hardships? How much better it would have been for you in the harem with maids doing service and many guarding!" said he with a dispirited laugh.

Sita smiled, for her husband was so full of grief not being able to bear her suffering. "My Lord! When your feet can roam about in these depopulated forests, how can I enjoy pleasure in the harem?" Sita looked at Rama in devotion. Rama felt slightly happy. "Yes, how can a virtuous woman like you live without her husband?" said he and walked on shaking his head in agreement.

The three of them walked under the trees slowly.[54]

Some unfamiliar forest odour from some tree or flower wafted in the air. Along with Sita's gait, her bangles and anklets were resounding, all the ornaments on her entire body produced different kinds of sound. In such huge forest, the gait of a woman, wearing ornaments producing sounds, was such that the entire forest with birds, animals, flowers and fruits looked at Sita in wonder.

Every where around there were *Neereedu* trees. Sita walked picking up the fruits fallen under the trees. Looking around, Sita began to ask curiously, "What is that tree? What is this tree? There, at a distance, beside that yellow flower bush…that…what is its name?" Rama told her some names which he knew: *Maddi, Palasa, Karaka, Garuga*. He was unwilling to say "I don't know" about those trees of which he did not know. So he was about to say, "You are woman! Why do you need the names of trees?" But he did not say so because he had told her some names until then. So he kept quiet without answering her.

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[53] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 52, slokas 95, 96 &99:** See how Rama instructed Lakshmana and Sita with regard to walking and what reason he gave for his walking behind! It is a matter to be thought over: whether the person should walk in front or behind if he wants to protect others in the forest! ★

[54] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 55, sloka 29:** Valmiki described Sita, who was walking between Rama and Lakshmana, as "a female elephant walking between two male elephants." Rama might not have imagined that the poet would ignore the kinship relations and make Lakshmana a male elephant and Sita a female elephant. What would have happened if he had imagined that? Nay, we can't even begin to imagine! ★

Sita too stopped asking questions as she understood that her husband was weak from fasting.

Although the sun was sharp, walking under the trees was comfortable for Rama. Pushing aside the twigs of trees, rubbing against the thick leaves in thick shade, he walked. At such places Lakshmana was moved on ahead along the side path and joined them again.

For Sita it was very pleasant like playing a game to walk rubbing against the leaves. At some places some branches were bent like hammocks pulling the edges or upper portion of the sari and as if asking her, "Why this hurry, Sita! Don't you sit for a while?" Sita laughed and jumped to the other side, leaning on the branch. She picked up fresh flowers here and there. "How beautiful these are compared to the flowers in our garden!" she said surprised, showing them to Rama.

Sweat was flowing from Lakshmana's hair onto his neck burning the wound of the Banyan milk. He put down the basket and bar for a while, scratched his neck and seized the basket and bar again.

"Lakshmana! Is that bundle heavy?"

Lakshmana stumbling and with bowed neck said, "Oh! No brother, sir! Enough of your grace, then what of this bundle, shall I not carry the worlds for your sake?" He attempted to walk straight raising himself up a bit up.

"Yes, Lakshmana! You are the epitome of virtue! You will endow our family with fame! *(by carrying bundles!)* You will always stay with me in the three worlds"

"It is my great fortune! Brother, sir! He tried to fold his hands in salutation, but fearing that the bundle would slip down, refrained from it. Gaining new strength from the appreciation of his brother, he walked briskly.

That forest was not totally without people. Here and there one or two men with trusses were in sight cutting wood. At a distance some animal would run on the fallen leaves. The glimmer of white hares was seen in bushes.

"Are these the forests?" asked Sita looking around.

"What! You have seen nothing! Still further…I told you…no heed…" Rama was about to say but kept quiet. Screwing up his eyes and looking in the distance, Rama said, "Lakshmana! Some village seems to be there. I think it is Vatsa land. Now no more fear. We'll stay in this bush." He looked around keenly.

Lakshmana halted under a tree, put down the basket and tried to unload the bundle. But it got stuck. His hair pained as it was pulled down by his fists. The bundle of saris got stuck to the Banyan milk glue on his head. Some how he pulled it out with his teeth clenched. A fistful of hair came off with the bundle. Rubbing on his head with palm he looked in the distance.

A black striped stag was seen grazing on the leaves.

Rama also saw that. He felt great enthusiasm, on seeing it. Rama liked hunting. He liked verison. At once he drew his arrow and shot the stag. Lakshmana's arrow also went straight and hit it. It groaned in pain with one cry and began rolling on the ground. Birds got frightened and rose up from the trees crying. After a while the groan of the stag ceased.

Again, hearing the groan of a wild boar birds started flying away frightened.

Rama's hunting enthusiasm pepped up. In no other sport did he derive more pleasure than in hunting and killing animals and humans! He hit another stag, running in fear into a bush, with an arrow. He shot a second arrow…third arrow... fourth arrow…It ran for some distance and another arrow hit it, and there itself it bent its legs, dropped down turning to a side and its head sagged.

Rama saw around blood thirst. A bison calf so tiny that it could not smell hunters, thrust its head out from the bush, looking for its mother with dark eyes. Rama's arrow hit it in the neck. The eyes froze just as they were. It appeared as though the bison calf was looking from the bush.

Not able to find animals any further Rama walked up to the tree.[55]

The whole thing was over *within the batting of an eyelid.*

Sita was standing all the while trembling like a bird wet in the rain. Seeing the eyes of the bison calf, melting with pity, unable to restrain her sad emotion, seeing Rama said with surprise, "My lord! Are sages supposed to hunt?"

Rama looked as though he had not understood her question.

"You have come prepared to lead the life of a sage..." Rama had not thought about that issue till then. Yes, sages do not hunt.

"Even supposing it is for self protection, these are not cruel animals at all!", said Sita again.

Rama was amazed. 'Is it Sita?...Right from the moment of coming out of the harem she had been asking something or the other. What was this attitude? How many more calamities would befall if women came out of the curtains and became wanderers of the world!'

"Where from do you get these thoughts? Have you ever known arguing with me? No scriptures ever said that it was wrong to hunt for food," said Rama and looked piercingly.

Sita lowered her head out of fear, but was suffering from the many questions she had in her mind. Was it hunting for food? Did they need so many animals for food? When all around there were so many fruits on the trees, should any scriptures specifically say that it was sinful to kill so many creatures unkindly. That tiny bison calf, those corpses lying down ghastly without life, the pools of blood spreading on the earth soaking it — Do they not proclaim that it was sinful?

Sita turned her face towards the river and sat behind the bundle.

The smell of blood mixed with the smell of lime flowers in the air.

Lakshmana took up the knife and plunged into the action of cutting up the animals. He cut the meat of only two animals here and there. He cut the meat in lumps, prepared it as he knew it. He went round and gathered dry sticks. He rubbed two pieces of stone to produce fire, but failed. He looked around, searching for someone to help him.

One trussed man was going briskly with a bundle of wood on his head.

Lakshmana called him with claps. The man with the bundle of sticks halted, turned round and came back. Learning the requirement, he dropped the load and made a fire within minutes. He arranged all the sticks in a suitable position, blew on it till a big flame was produced and made the fire. Lakshmana sat with the big lumps of meat behind him.

"Will you extend help, lord!" asked the man with the bundle of sticks, requesting him for help to lift up the load on to his head again.

Lakshmana set the baked lumps of meat out of sight, and waving his hand said, "No, No! We are not to touch you! We are Kshatriyas." He turned his head away.

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55. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 52, sloka 102: Rama and Lakshmana, for the sake of food, killed a boar, a bison, a deer, and a spotted deer. The ascetic-life of Rama began with meat - eating. Should they kill so many animals for food in one part of the day? This is merely cruel joy derived in 'killing'. Think about another point. In this story, when did *poetry first begin from the mouth* of Valmiki? When a hunter shot an arrow at a pair of birds and killed one of them, the second bird grieved and poetry sprang up as Valmiki was unable then to bear that agony of the bird. The same poet wrote this story subsequently, didn't he? Rama keeps on killing animals more than needed for food and gather heaps of them. Does he hunt without separating any pair among birds and animals? Why should this merciful man Valmiki who wrote this story make Rama kill so many animals? This is a quality of 'avarice'!

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The 'sticks man' looked as though he could not understand that, lifted the bundle on to his knee, then he held his breath for a while and with one jerk, he raised it onto his head and walked away briskly.

Rama, even before gratifying his hunting enthusiasm had dozed off, woke up as if somebody prompted at the smell of the oil of baking meat. He yawned in a way that would have frightened the birds, went to wash up, came back after washing his hands and feet in the river.

Lakshmana served the baked pieces of meat in leaves to his brother and sister-in-law.

Sita had one or two pieces. Then got up and picked up berries (*reegipallu*) and moved away from them to a distance.

Both the brothers ate greedily.

"Lakshmana! It is very tasty!"

"Yes, sir! Eat your full! I baked it on fire without washing off the blood"

"A little bit of salt would have made it better."

Salt! Alas! It would have been nice if father had given us a bag of salt as well. Now, how can we get salt in this forest?

Lakshmana felt very much *ashamed of his birth* that he could not create salt for his brother.

Rama's *hunger died down to a large extent.* It was already three nights since he had eaten food. Rama would have liked to eat roasted meat daily! The cooks fry lumps of meat in ghee which is very tasty. The lumps which Lakshmana fried were tastier even without salt! Perhaps it is due to hunger! Sita collected in the lap part of her sari *reegi*, *neereedu* and *usiri* fruits and gave them to both of them. Rama admonished her, "Why do you collect all the wild fruits in your lap, the sari gets stained."

Sita kept silent laughing like a child. Rama ate some fruits, drank water from the river and again sat under the tree.

By then the sun had gone down considerably.

All the ends of the sky had reddened as though *Sindhur* (Vermillion) had been poured. The water in the river reddened. Sita's white cheeks got reddened.

There loomed no danger, in spending the night, there for Rama. To the extent the eye could see, there were only trees and bushes and no caves, the abodes of tigers and lions, were in sight. What the boat men said was not false.

Birds, afraid of collecting on the tree under which Rama sat, hovered in the sky howling. One jay bird said to a yellow bird, "What shall we do sister-in-law? How long can we hover like this? There is no sign of their moving on. They may stay here tonight! That dark fellow sits extending his legs also! But if we look at those braids of hair and *dhotis*, they seem to be nice people!"

"You are very foolish. Oh! Look at those bows, arrows and their faces! Look at that side, how many animals they have killed and made a heap! You say nice, nice! Well, you haven't said they are gods!"

"What else can I do! My little one is calling at a stretch from the nest! Crying continuously, it may dry its mouth and it may die! Let whatever happens I'll go to it" so saying the jay bird darted into the nest.

Following it many birds darted into their nests.

The Jay bird's child embraced her mother. "Mom! Mom! I was terribly frightened that you might not come! What do they do under our home, sitting there! Till now they walked tall. You mention about lions. Are these they?" she pointed downwards.

"Tut! Lions are so nice! They will do us no harm! These are men! Nothing else is as bad in the world as these. Be careful if you see any of these! They will pierce through our bellies with those pointed sticks!"

"Yes, mom! You know what those darkies have done a while ago?"

"Don't thrust your head like that, stupid! You don't have fear. I shall give you away to them?"

"Oh! Mom! No!"

"Then don't look at that side! You will be frightened if you see them in the darkness.

"Okay, I won't look that side....Mom!....."

"What do you say again?"

"You speak about goblins! Are these they?"

"Oh! How you irritate me! You don't seem to have the fear that they look this side. Oh! You black devil! Come here! Take away my child"

"Mom! Mom! Don't call the devil! Don't call him!" the young bird embraced its mother.

Sita smiling said to Rama, "Look at that young jay bird there in that branch, how it couches in its mother's wings." She pointed in that direction.

Rama shaking his head said, "Yes! The jay bird meat is extremely tasty. Our cooks prepare it very deliciously! …Lakshmana, better place this bundle of saris in some bush, just for safety!" said he and looked around.

"Yes, brother, sir, I will. I thought of doing that myself. But was waiting for your command" saying so, he got up and placed the bundle in a nearby reed bush, adjusted it well, and returned to his brother and sat in front of his brother bowing his head in obeisance.

The noise of the birds abated to a large extent. Now and then a male bird with the tendency of coming home late, came alone hooking. Except for the light of the stars on the river, darkness enveloped them all around.

The odour of the trees, the smell of the droppings of the birds, the smell of the reed, the smell of the flowers and all mingled into a forest smell is intoxicating and bitter. Cicadas vied with one another and like the turns in a play were screaming one outdoing another. Fire flies flying all over the forest and playing hide and seek like the stars.

Sita exhausted after a long walk dozed off. Some fire flies shone over her head and hovered there.

Rama fell into a reverie, reminded of the cooks, harems, sporting halls, politics, along with jay bird meat.

Such a lonely night, such a dark night, such a night Rama had never experienced in his life! From the moment the coronation was off, he had experienced a commotion in his mind, which he had not poured out before any one so far. He hid all his opinions when he spoke to his mother or his wife. He restrained his melancholy within himself sensing that people around him would look at his face eagerly. Even after leaving Ayodhya, Sumantra was with them. Only tonight, he had the confidence of speaking whatever he wanted openly. That too before Lakshmana! Except worshipping him Lakshmana would never think about anything else. He would never doubt, never question, argue with him.

Rama's heart was boiling with anger about the gross injustice done to him. Sighing every now and then he said, "Lakshmana! Will king Dasaratha have a comfortable sleep with the sorrow of our absence?" He waited hesitantly for the reaction of his brother.[56]

Lakshmana — who determined that their father had died the previous night finished wailing as is the fashion and the duty of a son in the presence of Guha — concurred with Rama, "Yes, sir, His Excellency can not comfortably sleep. He might be grieving a lot." "For that matter, every body in the kingdom will be deeply grieving", he sighed.

Rama said, "However much people grieve, Kaika will not, will she? What trouble does she have? Why would she grieve? Moreover, she will be glad also. She may be sleeping happily that her desire is fulfilled. Won't it take some fifteen days more for the arrival of Bharata? Till then she may pester the king! After her son's arrival she will feel confident, 'Now there is no worry, the kingdom is ours.' Thereafter she will allow husband to live on. Lakshmana! You know what I feel thinking about it? — This devil of a woman has dropped in to our house from such a far off place with a view to killing our father and seizing the kingdom. Her husband anyway is old, he will die tomorrow if not today. Her son will inherit the throne. What more does she need? Will not she become arrogant with power in hand and wallowing in treasures?[57]

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[56] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 53:** We can see how clearly, how nakedly Rama expressed his inner agony and grief; anger at his father and a grudge against Kaika. We can see how Rama felt jealous of Bharata becoming king, how he got upset at his bad luck and how much he cursed his father — and we are surprised, "Is this Sri Rama?" We can also examine the extent of truth in what Rama said to every one, "I am not at all feeling sorry for losing the kingdom"; how far his filial devotion to his father is true when he repeatedly declared, "I will follow the commands of my father." In this entire sarga, Rama abuses his father a lot!

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Won't she become blind with power and all that? Will she allow her rival-wives to live on? What harm will she cause my mother!

Oh! What a terrible thing has taken place? That day our father called me secretly and warned me of many things! But in the end, he fell himself to her lust. By dawn he had changed strangely. Really, he should not have been allowed to visit her house that night, then this calamity would not have fallen to our lot. Really, seeing his sudden change, I get the thought that a man yields to lust more easily than to virtue (Dharma) or money. By the by, after getting so old, what is this lust for women? What is that lust, ignoring the good or the bad! If it is not that, would any fool or ignoramus mete out such injustice to a son who loyally obeys him! How I used to worship father! How humble was I? Did I ever raise my head and oppose him? We will come to know how Bharata respects father tomorrow! How much will the mother and son trouble him? His Excellency will realize it all too well! They should trouble him. These sort of people (like father) will get sense. The whole world must talk about the fate of Dasaratha which will befall people who yield to women without heed." When Rama was darting these words, Lakshmana, who had never known his brother to speak like that, was amazed and stood motionless.

"How strange it is! Is this Lord Ramachandra? Is it Lord Vishnu reproaching his father like this? Is it the loyal follower of father's command so cursing his father? He said there was no fault in our step-mother. He convinced others that it was the will of god and his destiny? He said we should defend father's vow for the sake of truth. What is this change of attitude? Is he clamouring for the kingdom? If he thought that father had yielded to base lust, then why did he respect father so much? He could well defy father's order and occupy the kingdom himself! Why this duplicity?" Lakshmana's inner voice was thinking greatly astonished. "Oh, stay silent! Keep mum", Lakshmana warned it.

Rama's emotional outburst did not subside and he waved his fist in the darkness. "Do you think I did not do anything because of my inability? The sages laud my ability and energy. You have heard, eh? You told me in various ways to occupy the kingdom. What do you think, why did I keep quiet? It is for my pious lands, not for father's pleasure! Will father's pleasure become my pleasure? — Phew! Are these kingdoms permanent or these bodies? We should get fame and not an ill name? Can I throw away pious lands by defying father? So I cogitated sensibly and consoled myself", Rama boiled with emotion. "Lakshmana! If I decide I want something, why just Ayodhya? I can attack and hit the entire world with arrows.....What sort of ants are these! They vex me! Are they not biting you?" He shook of the ants moving sportingly on his thighs and crushed those which he could catch and shook off those which he could not seize. Some got stuck up in the gum of the hair and were groaning unable to come out.

Rama roughly scratched his head for some time with the hands.

Lakshmana was unable to speak some how out of shyness. He was unable to bear his brother's downfall in every sphere.

"If arrangements are made for pious lands, why does your brother have a passion for the

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57. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 53, Sloka 15: Rama used the word 'arrogance' abusing Kaika. The poet used the expression '*sowbhagya madamohita*', meaning 'became arrogant with good fortune', 'intoxicated with wealth', or 'blinded by pride of good fortune.' ★

kingdom?" Lakshmana's inner voice heckled Lakshmana. Lakshmana mumbled and fumbled, — "No! It is not passion for kingdom. Just…for…for that matter…"

"Why do you mumble? It is so obvious! Why do you try to dupe me?" his inner voice is demanding as some enemies would demand. Lakshmana became furious, "Look here! Just I allow you for the sake of grace. But what is your attitude? — Have you no sense? So, you have become competent to criticise Lord Ramachandra! I do not tolerate it, you see. You must have respect for elders. He is talking good and bad, joy and grief….but not out of a desire for the kingdom!

The inner voice cut to the quick, "All right, tomorrow, if not today, even the world will come to know all your tricks. Why should I intervene? Both you and your elder brother will plunge into the Ganges. See, it is nearby." It ceased contemptuously.

"If we plunge, you too will drown in the Ganges and die", said Lakshmana angrily aloud.

Rama jerked up suddenly from his deep thought.

"What? Plunging into the Ganges and dying? Who do you talk about?" said he turning pale.

Saluting with folded hands in a hurry Lakshmana said, "No, not you, sir! Not you!" he stretched his hands and caught hold of his brother's feet as his salutation would not be visible in that darkness.

Rama did not question him further.

In that depopulated forest, in that pitch dark night both the brothers sat silently and depressed.

The wind was moving all around in the darkness without fear, ripened leaves were softly falling and floating down.

Sita, seeing the bison calf eyes in a dream turned to Rama's side in that sleep and caught hold of him.

Rama felt distressed looking at his wife. "I am unfortunate! My wife is unfortunate! Lakshmana,! I do not have the good fortune of becoming a king of the Kosala kingdom like Bharata. My wife does not have the fortune of enjoying the pleasures and treasures like his wife. Bharata has become king without enemies. Even if I console myself on losing the kingdom, what is this plight? Why do I suffer this roaming about in the forest with trees and moles? Why should I get this punishment meted out to people guilty of treason? My mother might have separated some mother and her child", he sighed.

"It is your nature to push the blame on others always. It won't leave you! Why do you blame your mother? You yourself might have separated a mother and child. Why don't you think that you are thrown afar because of your own sins." Lakshmana's inner voice intended to rebuke Rama, but he kept quiet in view of propriety.

Lakshmana, who had come away leaving behind mother, younger brother and even his wife, was still listening to his brother's words again and again in all humility.

"My mother brought me up with grand hopes from my childhood! But I, following this vow of this filial devotion to father, have come away leaving mother. Why should mothers have sons like me? *Are we born to burn away*? What comforts has my mother had from me? Her pet birds reproach vengefully Kaika, causing her great pleasure. I could not do even that much! I…" Rama began grieving as if he was grieving for not being able to serve his mother, and as if his life was all in vain not being able to serve his mother. Grief was gushing out crossing false solemnity like the sea crossing the shore. The invisible anger transformed into grief like a fire globule without flames. Rama bowed his head and cried so much that his shoulders shook again and again.

Lakshmana perturbed much at his brother's attitude was dumb found and looked on without a word.

Some time passed in silence. The silence got a break with the gasping of Rama intermittently.

After wailing for some time and feeling sorry that he was pouring out only his pain and pleasure without caring for Lakshmana, and in order not to create any ill will in Lakshmana, Rama said, "Lakshmana! Why should you too be away from your mother? Early in the morning tomorrow return home.[58] My troubles are mine. Just take care of my mother a bit. Kaika might do her some harm", Rama raised his head and imagining the absence of Lakshmana, he burst out.

Lakshmana was moved and being unbearable to see his brother's pitiable condition, said, "Brother, Sir, what is this timidness? Where has all your valour gone? If a great hero like you grieve so much, how can my sister-in-law and I be brave? Shall I go even to heaven without you? I do not want any thing except serving you. Let us find a good location and build a cottage and live there comfortably. I will do every thing. Of course I am not competent enough to advise you. Be brave", said Lakshmana bravely, to Rama. Lakshmana's body had a pulsing feeling when he was instilling confidence consoling his brother, who in that isolation of darkness was grieving and losing heart. While he was feeling extremely sorrowful at the thought that it would have been very difficult for his brother, had he not come, could he leave him and go away?

Lakshmana's amazement subsided a bit and he could understand the nature of his brother to some extent — Brother is not as solemn as others estimated him to be. He is as helpless as he is strong. However he might pose before the world, he can't not but pour out his mind with his near and dear. Lakshmana felt like embracing his brother and consoling him, as a mother would embrace and console a crying child. Since he had no intimacy of putting his hand on his brother, he seized the feet of Rama and prayed, "Don't grieve brother, don't be sad. Don't wail."

Rama's sorrow increased the more Lakshmana prayed. He continued to cry for a long time. Lakshmana too sat with tears gushing down. Blowing his nose in between he said, "Brother, sir, do you think that the former beauty and charm remain in Ayodhya in your absence? No, never. Ayodhya will be devoid of brilliance, take my word! No, Ayodhya will not at all be good. The sun won't shine. There will be no moon! Neither will the stars shine. The wind will not blow. The birds won't sip water. Wild animals don't hunt each other. For that matter, people won't be able to survive. The cats and owls will roam about, even during the day. No, who will survive with pleasure and comfort?" Suddenly an ant pricked Lakshmana and he left the feet of this brother and wiped it off his back.

After gaining confidence that Ayodhya in his absence would go to dogs, Rama felt very satisfied. His sorrow also abated. Remaining silent for some time, he wiped his nose and eyes with the *dhoti*. "Lakshmana! Kaika might be wicked, but don't you think Bharata is good?" he asked hesitantly. There was some hope glimmering still in Rama's mind. He remembered some incidents of Bharata's childhood when Bharata had behaved obediently with him. Would such a man be willing to rule the kingdom even after hearing about the injustice done to his brother? Well, we can't say! Is it power or something else? Moreover, it was already ten years since he left that place! How much the man may have changed! How much his mind might have changed! Not willing to utter those words aloud, he said, "Bharata is good man! I think he will treat my mother respectfully! What do you say?" He looked at Lakshmana hopefully as though his sole concern was his mother's safety.

Lakshmana had no trust in Bharata. Is treating one's mother with respect alone goodness? He won't give up kingdom for the sake of his elder brother, will he? Then what sort of goodness is it? "Brother, Sir, Take rest. It is past midnight. Sleep well." Lakshmana again prayed Rama.

Rama's grief was mitigated to a great extent by talking out his heart to some extent.

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58. Although Rama asked Lakshmana to go home, he would have in fact returned from the shore of Ganges and fallen at the feet of Kaika if Lakshmana had not accompanied him! If Rama completed the exile period, the entire credit goes to Lakshmana! For the basis of this observation, see later! ★

People with ego who feel themselves to be 'great', unburden themselves by expressing their feelings to others whom they feel are inferior to them. Rama felt that relief, lay down on the ground putting his hand beneath his head.

Lakshmana sat pressing the feet of his brother.

After a while, with a new thought of remorse started in the mind of Rama. 'Lakshmana is many a time inferior to me; my servant. Have I talked all and sundry castigating my solemnity with such a fellow? Have I expressed my helplessness before such a person without bearing my grief? What respect would he show to me from tomorrow? What trust would he have in my valour? In fact, Lakshmana had been behaving so obediently since childhood with the idea that I would become king. It is because of my misfortune I had lost the kingdom and I too had fallen on a par with Lakshmana! I was suspecting all the while that Lakshmana would slight me for being thrown out of the kingdom. Now, behaving foolishly, I have lost all that respect. Though outwardly he has talked courteously, won't he think some thing else in his mind…How better it would be if what he thinks can be is known! Anyway, I have committed a big blunder, a big blunder! Why should I speak from my heart! It was a big blunder!'

Thinking that his brother had fallen asleep, Lakshmana slowly left the feet and went to some distance and lay down thinking.

"Lakshmana!"

Lakshmana woke up with a jerk, "Salutation, brother! What is your command?"

"Lakshmana! Are you perturbed by my words? I spoke as is the wont of the world and not that I am ambitious to get the kingdom, you know! Don't think that I am grieving for leaving the kingdom"

"How so! You wanted to rule the State with the intention of looking after the welfare of the world. Will you have such a mean ambition for the kingdom? Cannot I understand that much brother?"

"Well, forget about that! This is the third night in our exile. Still if we spend 13 years, 11 months and 27 days, it will be over. Be careful! Bundle…Sita…" Saying so he yawned and shut his eyes.

* * *

The day dawned. Birds began squealing deafening the ears.

Sita rose early, had her bath and dried her sari. Lime flowers fell on the water, spreading fragrance. Sita's hair blew about in the air, spreading the fragrance of the lime.

Birds chirped more and more. Some tiff might have occurred between a bird on the tamarind tree and a bird on the mango tree. They were chattering interminably at each other. Some birds on one side and some birds on the other side were screaming. There was a hell of commotion.

"What differences have cropped up between them, better it became clear", thought Sita, picking up feathers from under the trees. She kept them aside collecting a large variety of fruits and flowers.

Rama and Lakshmana woke up, had their bath, offered salutations to the sun and ate fruits to their fill.

The quarrel of the birds subsided somewhat.

Looking curiously at Rama, Sita asked, "Lord! Is there a language for the birds?" she asked.

"Every creature will have one"

"How can we know about what they are talking?"

"What else Sita? May be about the exile of Sri Rama"

Sita could not believe it. She kept silent.

The three started on their journey again. Sita looked at the tree for the jay bird.

Pointing out Sita to her mother, the young one said, "Mom! Mom! See that fair one! How it laughs! Yesterday also it laughed many times seeing me! That too is going away!" it looked downcast.

"Let it go! We will be free from the menace!"

"What a pity, what has it done to us? It has no *sticks* of arrows"

"If it does not? Others have them!"

But the young jay bird did not like Sita going away! It thrust its beak out from the nest and craning its neck cried out, "Oh! Fair! Stay here! Let the others go" cried she. Its mother smiled and fondled it.

Lakshmana lifted all the luggage. The three walked on. Lakshmana's eyes were burning. He had been awake throughout the night and had only a shut eye when it was about to dawn. His head was heavy due to a lack of sleep. Some twig scratched him on the wound of Banyan milk and the skin tore off, making it red. That suppurated the sore causing pain.

The bundle seemed heavier than the day before. Setting aside his physical pain, Lakshmana felt more respect and humility for his brother in his mind. He felt like saluting him with folded hands but the hands were occupied. Looking at the path well he went ahead.

Sita was walking absorbed looking at the unending line of trees. It appeared as though Nature was dancing in tune to the sounds of her jingling bangles and anklets. Every tree was loaded with flowers or fruits. Berries were like corals on the twigs. Trees not known by their names were bent with bunches of fruits on their branches and hanging with heaviness. Every where flowers in bunches and yellow stem flowers intertwined with one another from one creeper to the other and myriad flowers blossomed on the ground. How many varieties of birds there were! Never seen before! What a number of strange sounds! How many wonderful strange throats like the tunes of a Veena (lute)! What soft cooing! White birds settled on the trees looked as though they were flowers blossomed in bunches.

At a distance a bear, rising on his hind legs, bending a branch ate some fruits.

Sita felt amused and showed it to Rama, "Look there!"

Rama was about to draw an arrow. Sita was bewildered. "No, No", she warned.

Rama also hesitated. Some recollections.... Viswamitra... Bears... Monkeys... attachments... killing of Ravana!" How will they help in battles? — he furrowed his brows, in a frown giving up the attempt of drawing out the arrow to shoot, he moved ahead.

At the noise of people the bear disappeared like lightning.

Sita felt assured. Again she was absorbed in enjoying the beauty of the forest.

The incident of the night before, that of his conduct before Lakshmana pricked him like a thorn. He was trying to avoid facing Lakshmana as far as possible from the time it had dawned.

Lakshmana spared no effort in *melting the muscles, formed with fat and butter from the time of his birth, in the service of his brother.* He was sweating profusely.

Birds used to the sight of load carriers did not stir on seeing Lakshmana.

Birds on the trees, cried frightened on seeing Rama who with sharp looks and who took into his hand every now and then his bow as though he was angry with some one and walked with the gait that quaked the earth under his feet, flew away. Animals too ran away.[59]

Sita as though she were reminded of something asked Rama with disappointment, "I was eager to see lions. They are not present in this forest?...I don't see even tigers. They had said snakes as big as hills would lie across the path. Even they are not present here, why?"

Rama was absorbed in his thoughts. He did not reply.

Lakshmana walking with Sita, said respectfully, "There are no such fears in this forest, sister-in-law"

"Not fears! Why should there be fears when your brother is here? I have never seen lions. If not in a forest, where else can we see them...Tell me, have you ever seen lions?"

"No, sister-in-law"

"Has your brother seen them?"

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[59] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 54, sloka 9:** See how the 'wonderful form' of Rama frightens animals and birds. Why do birds and beasts fear him? They fear only when they see hunters. Or, are they afraid when they see humans who appear cruel and terrifying. If birds and animals are afraid of some one, it is an indication of cruelty in looks, actions and walking.

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"No, sister-in-law"

"Alas! So!" she fell into a reverie. When she had offered to accompany Rama to forest, he had recounted many strange things, so they were all recited without his having seen any of them!...He said, "Many, many wild animals will be there, snakes will be there. There will be no room to place even to place a foot because of thorns. There will be insects." Would all these come across some where else? There is so much beauty all around...so many trees...so many flowers...

Some mendicants belonging to a class of sooth sayers were passing by, singing songs.

Sita forgot about the lions and began looking at them. Now and then some rustics — might be beggars or wood-cutters — went across with baskets and wickets and yokes. Their shouts and claps made to drive away birds, from the bamboo platforms! There were songs in the air occasionally from people not seen nearby.

But everything was amazing Sita.

In the harem maids and slave women wore fair saris. Adorned themselves with ornaments and decorated themselves. Here — these people both men and women appear half-naked. There is no grace of dress or ornaments; even the hair is without oil.

But their countenances!...What a variety of expressions! There is no comparison between the faces of the people in the harem and these faces here. That solemnity, that modesty and that devotion are not here even for a sample! None exhibit modesty to any other. None salute to any other. None issues commands. None should awe. No solemnity on any body's face. The looks are as natural as the looks of birds and animals. Clear expressions.

Like young ones taken to a Vanity Fair, Sita looked at the people sighted upon on the way closely with a smiling face. Their songs...though not intelligible...she listened to attentively. Those songs with unheard of words...have so much melancholy. So many hardships. Disappointment. Prayers to gods. Vows. Again satisfaction. While singing like that, one moment sorrow and the next moment gladness appeared on their faces. The next moment again indifference, as though they were laughing at the charm of their lives. They were singing of their own lives with the mingling of pain and pleasure together. Those songs, those trembling voices, those moistened eyes, saluting to the skies with heartfelt hope — Sita felt a deep sympathy for them. These folk songs seemed more pleasing, greater and better than the music of the harems, the tunes of scholarly music composers. Listening to those songs, the mind was carried off by incomprehensible despondency for long.

The mendicant singers accompanied them to some distance and went ahead singing towards a village afar on a cross-cut path.

"They are praying something to god! Do you understand anything?" she asked Rama.

Rama looked startled. Would he ever think about such people who were mean like crows and dogs? Why should his wife too think about them?

"The songs of the folk people are strange. Have you listened to them attentively?" she repeated.

Rama said frowning, "Are all meaningless words songs? Moreover, praying to gods? What do they pray for? Do they ask for kingdoms being princes? Do they ask for heavens as they perform ritual sacrifices? They may not attain salvation even after many thousand births! Why do you think about those low human beings? Aren't you satisfied with watching the beauty of this surrounding forest?" He said reproachfully.

Sita was taking steps dispiritedly. One old man, a beggar was walking with strokes of walking stick, hanging an alms sack on his shoulder.

Sita raising her head on hearing the shrieks of birds, saw around and attempted to pluck fruits hanging in bunches in a shrub. The old man coming behind her warned her affectionately, "Don't pluck strange fruits, girl! There may be many poisonous trees! Their flowers and fruits harm a lot! Those trees serve no useful purpose to any creature except providing abode to snakes. Don't touch every plant, girl!"

Sita hesitated, stopped plucking the fruits and walked ahead.

"Oh! —" cried Lakshmana and threw the basket down and took his foot into his hand. A thorn the size of a needle had pierced the right foot, peeping out.

"What is that? What has happened?" Sita is agitated.

"Nothing, sister-in-law! A tiny thorn! That's all. Don't worry", Lakshmana pulled it out clenching his teeth. The whole thorn seemed to have come out. But when he resumed walking, the piece of thorn stuck somewhere inside and is causing piercing pain touching the pate. It is pricking. He is afraid of placing the foot on ground. "If some body pulls out the piece of thorn", hope glimmered.

"Isn't he here? Your brother, sir! Why don't you ask him to pull it out? Why should somebody else come and do it?" his inner voice said derisively.

Lakshmana was startled, "Brother, sir? Brother touching my feet? Do you prate as you wish?" He boxed the ear of the inner voice. Inner voice tearfully said, "Tut, if I interfere this time, question me!" It hid its face slighted. Lakshmana with the satisfaction of teaching a lesson to his inner voice, tried to walk fast. Jagged somewhere! Life got strangled.

"Why do you limp, Lakshmana?" Rama, by then saw him turning his head round.

"Salutation, brother, sir! Nothing in particular, a base thorn…but I have pulled it out long ago," Lakshmana was feeling jubilant that his brother had talked to him after a long time. Lakshmana felt charmed that it was his good fortune to have the thorn pricking him.

"Oh! So! Be watchful of the path while walking."

"Yes, sir, I'll obey your order"

The inner voice became furious.

"Just for the present the queen thorn occupying the throne in the sole of the foot should get dethroned for you to obey your brother's orders" heckled the inner voice, being unable to keep silent.

Lakshmana made no hint of protest. He was walking carefully taking steps without touching the ground with that foot, controlling his breath and limping.

Some children were going along driving a flock of cows, playing on flutes.

One washerman was driving a donkey loaded with bundle of clothes, singing rustic songs.

The donkey looked at Lakshmana askance with sympathy.

The washerman halted singing, saw Lakshmana and asked, "why do you limp like that, my boy?" He enquired compassionately.

Lakshmana felt relieved. "A dirty thorn pricked me, man!" said he. "Will you…" he was about to say. Then the washerman said, "show me where it is! Sit here. I'll see", so saying the washerman stopped the donkey, surveyed around and brought a thorn.

Lakshmana unloaded the bundle and basket and placed them at a distance.

Rama and Sita sat under a tree.

The washerman squatted on the ground and taking the foot of Lakshmana on to his lap, frowning eyes after examining it said, "Oh! The dirty thing! How deeply it has pierced! Shut your eyes, my boy! I shall see its end." Cursing the thorn in crude foul words, he pulled out the broken piece after a while.

The washerman appeared like Indra to Lakshmana and he showed the wound on the ear also.

"Alas! Alas! How have you made it so, boy" said the washerman. He plucked two green leaves and squashed the juice on the wound and said, "After reaching home rub off some dry ginger and apply that! Where do you hail from?" — he asked straightening out the foot pierced by the thorn and sat down observing Lakshmana. The washerman liked the features and outlines of Lakshmana. He had a nubile daughter. He was searching for a good boy who would live in his father-in-law's house. The washerman — looking up and down at Lakshmana and the bundle at a distance — thought, "Will he agree? If he agrees it will be a good match. The boy appears to be hard working. He will make a suitable match to my girl in age and height." He felt joyful reflecting on the marriage of his daughter. "My boy! In how many houses do you wash clothes? The bundle is very huge! Do they pay in kind by weighing grains or cash down business? Why haven't you bought a donkey? I have two with me. If you are willing…I'll give my daughter Ratti to you…"

Lakshmana relieved from the pain of the thorn and in the comfort of the washerman straightening his foot, wallowed in the reverie of princely comforts had not heard any word which the washer man had said. He narrated his travails and tribulations, "Washerman! who do you think we are? We are the sons of King Dasaratha. We are in exile because of some sin in some previous birth, as the gods rake such birth on this earth by getting cursed." Lakshmana sighed.

The washerman turned pale and looked bewildered pitifully. "Alas! Oh! Pity! Mentally astray! Thank god! Have not offered my girl carried away by his appearance with out considering the pros and cons! She would have suffered all her life!" so thinking he slowly rose up.

Lakshmana too shook his leg, walked two steps, and lifting the bundle with a relieved face, took hold of the basket and crow bar again.

All of them started again. The washerman driving the donkey by the side of Rama said, "You better carry the bundle for some time instead of making that mad man carry it. *Will you develop muscles by simply walking like that swinging your hands?*.....Eh, Hey, this side, that side, have you forgotten tank pank, you go the other side." He reproached both Rama and the donkey in the same breath.

Rama solemnly frowned and walked faster.

The washerman drove the donkey away to the tank and washing place.

"Lakshmana! Haven't you told that base man, our past history?" He said finding fault with him.

Lakshmana submitted trembling, "I have, brother, sir! But he did not believe it."

Rama's anger turned in the direction of Kaika. "Wicked woman! Asking for a boon, sent us to forests! Evil woman! Might be swaggering with pride seizing the kingdom. Can she escape hell for causing grief to her husband?"

The three walked silently for a long distance.

The sun was scorching.

Sita felt exhausted.

There was a tank at a distance, it was shining as if some piece of mirror had fallen to the ground.

"Let us sit for some time", said Sita.

They reached the shore of the tank. The shore was cool with trees like a snow mountain. Lotus leaves filled the tank and tried to hide water conspiring among themselves. Some people were quarreling under a tree. Somebody was adjudicating. It was noisy.

Some wood-cutters were under a tree and behind it they were burning a fire with sticks and were cooking something.

Rama was unwilling to halt there. Sita expressed her inability to walk sat under a tree. Rama turned his face towards the tank and stood leaning against a tree.

Sita looked around. At a distance was a stone figure with vermillion marks at the foot of a tree. Children might have thrown it while playing or some novice sculptor might have left it there half finished. Devotees going on that way smeared it with vermilion and placed some flowers there.

Sita turned that side and saluted with devotion.

A wood-cutter was resting his head on a stone was opening and closing his eyes and heaving his nostrils at the smell of gruel. "Have you finished, eh?", he asked.

The woman stirring the gruel with a stick, said irritated, "What is the hurry? I won't eat it all by myself with out giving it to you." A boy of some four or five years, was playing with a top sitting in the dust naked.

Lakshmana placed the bundle behind a tree, put the basket on it upside down, kept the crow-bar as weight on it and took a dip in the tank.

Sita is looking at the pot simmering in wonder.

"What is that? In that black one?" — Sita.

"Cooking something" — Rama.

"What do they do?"

"What do they do? Eat it?"

"Eat! What taste would it have?"

"Vulgar people. They find their taste in it"

Lakshmana made a cup with lotus leaves, brought water in it — first for Sita and then for Rama.

The boy playing with the top, rushed to his mother and falling on her back, asked, "Mom Mom! Who are they?"

His mother taking out gruel with the stick and putting it on her tongue said, "How do I know, boy! They may be some wood-cutters like us or may be washermen." But she looked at Sita and began to wonder.

"My foot! See that lady, looks like one from a high family. Those two washermen might be accompanying her to her in-law's place or her mother's place", said her husband.

"You fellow, it is strange, will they do so on foot? Don't they have palanquins?"

Some of these words reached Rama and Lakshmana's ears.

Rama turned his face again towards the tank.

Lakshmana looked at her nose whether it was suitable for cutting off. He felt angry with all the people there. "You fools! Listen all of you! We are king Dasaratha's……." He was about to declare, but kept silent.

They put the steaming gruel on the leaves and were eating it eagerly. Sita alone looked at them with singular wonder.

That woman wore a dyed sari with spots on it. There were tears in every spot. It was sari only nominally, it was torn all over. She wore no blouse. The sari covered neither the front nor the back of her upper body.

Lakshmana looked for the bundle to see if it were safe. It was full of silk saris!

The boy gulped some gruel, he was reminded of the top and ran towards it. He twined the top from which the cord came off and spun it on the ground. That came to Lakshmana spinning round and round. The boy came running and lay in the dust till the top stopped turning and the moment it stopped, caught it. With his jumps the dust rose up like pollen.

Rama with a solemn face said, "Boy, don't raise the dust!"

Without comprehending anything, the boy asked, "Do you know how to play with tops?" He came very close to Rama.

"Hey, boy, come, lick up this left over gruel", the boy's father shouted.

"No, I won't," said the boy, again busy with twining the top.

"Oh, my dear, please, just once!"

"I don't need it, eh Papa", the boy said irritated.

Lakshmana perceiving that Rama could not tolerate the boy's disobedience rebuked the boy, "You should not speak to your father like that! It is wrong! You should say, "father, sir!" "

The father of the boy coming to him with the gruel leaf felt ashamed on hearing Lakshmana's words. "Such words are befitting big people like you, but why do we need them? My body is filled with joy at his calling me like that "eh, Papa!" Some times he rebukes me with foul language 'bastard', 'son of an ass!' — Oh! He has picked up all the words! Hey, come here, lick the leaf and go", he went after the boy, removed the leftover from the leaf with fingers and made the boy lick it.

Then he felt, on seeing Rama and Lakshmana, their high descent. "What are you, sirs!" he asked Lakshmana, with respect.

Lakshmana sighed and said, "What is all that for, man! It is not a believable story! As a matter of fact we are great kings. We have fallen victims to fate for reasons beyond us." He lowered his head.

The wood cutter *slapping his own cheeks* apologetically said, "We don't know, sir! How do we know whether you are kings or great kings? You should have ornaments from top to bottom, they should be glittering! Without them how can people like us recognize you? Tell me, sir! There are hands and feet for a Prince as well as a pauper. The whole greatness is in the attire, sir"

In the meanwhile his wife has washed the gruel pot in the pond and placed it in the basket and lifted it on to her head. The whole family fitted in the basket: two pots, a small earthen kettle, two pieces of clothing. They do not have any clothing, weapons and shields enough for years together. They do not have enough flour for the night even. Theirs is not the life of sages, taking advance care. They are a low family who cast the responsibility of getting food for the following day on god.

"Get up, man! You still sit like that!" she hurried up her husband.

"I'll go, sir!" the wood-cutter said and forcibly placing his son on his shoulder who was running and walked ahead looking back again and again.

The cord of the top was rubbing the ground, raising dust.

Sita placed her head in the lap of Rama and dozed off.

The quarrel of the people under the tree became clear on hearing it, it was a fight for property between father and son. The mediators failing to convince them, felt slighted and went their way. The son, shaking his head cloth said to his father, "If you are willing, come home. If not go your way. I'll share with you the gruel I eat. It will not be possible for you to get royal treatment from me" — so saying he walked off with wide paces. The old father came coughing to the tree where Rama was sitting. He went on narrating his long account, without caring for the other's listening to it. "Do I have treasures or riches, my boy! I am a penniless father. Which son will respect such a father? If he were to inherit a few farthings after I am gone he would have treated me well *like an apple of the eye*! I have spoiled two acres of land, boy! A fool I am!" saying so, he sat there regretfully with tears.

Seeing such people around and listening to their talk, Rama felt that he had slipped from heaven, fallen into a highly cruel abyss and a great pit of sin. It would be virtuous and far the better to spend his time among wild animals in a thick forest than spending even a moment among these rustic and base people. There everyday sages would come to be seen, making it a feast for the eyes — Rama was eager to leave the villages quickly.

After a while Sita woke up.

They continued walking again.

The forest got sparse and the paths looked trodden. Here and there people were burning reed shrubs and bushes, to make land arable. The logs of wood for timber were seen in many places. They were cutting down some trees still. Singing songs, they were pulling logs fastening them with ropes. Except a piece of cloth covering their private parts, none had any piece of cloth on their bodies. Women too were equally bare. They had no other thought except a concentration on their work. It seems that the lugging work does not seem to be heavy for them as they pulled their life which was heavier than those logs. They were relaxing with the songs.

By sun set Sita, Rama and Lakshmana reached the place of confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna. From a distance was heard the noise of the rivers. The whole place was more beautiful than the former forests, with the trees of flowers and fruits.

They were able to reach the hermitage of the sage Bharadwaja. Seeing that place Rama felt rejuvenated. It was as though he had seen the sages ages ago. There was no more misfortune than spending a day without the meeting of sages. All his strength was due to the blessings of the sages.

Birds frightened at the sight of the hunter flew above and boosted.

Smoke from the hermitage rose in spirals like the necks of pigeons. Throats reciting some incantations were heard from a distance.

Sage Bharadwaja had just then completed his evening fire rituals. Some sages and disciples were sitting surrounding the sage. Rama on seeing all the sages — overwhelmed with joy and sorrow, filled with emotion and tears, bowed to all and stood there with humility. Lakshmana also put down the load and bowed to all.

Rama modestly began to say, "Great sage Bharadwaja! We are the sons of King Dasaratha. This is my wife Sita. My father on the demand of a woman, dethroned me and has sent me to……." He stopped saying further and bowed his head.

Bharadwaja, stroking his beard, opened his eyes after closing them. "I have heard it, my son! I have heard of it! Your father exiled you to the forest without any reason, I have heard! Your father has done an evil thing." He felt sorry. All the sages too regretted this act, "Yes, yes! Dasaratha has not acted properly."

Rama felt very satisfied that all the sages had recognised the injustice done to him. For that matter he felt glad that so much injustice had been done. If not, before so many sages, his reputation would be so greatly tarnished…

Looking solemnly at the sage Bharadwaja, Rama said, "whatever way my father does, is gladdening to me, sir! Since I am devoted to my father, I have come away abiding by his wishes giving up the kingdom. My wife is such a virtuous lady, she has come along with me to these cruel forests without leaving me. My brother has such fraternal devotion that he has come along with me to serve me, seeking salvation in it. We live in the forests observing virtue, eating roots and fruits." He bowed low.[60]

Bharadwaja stroking his long beard said, "I am glad, my boy! It is very pleasing to see the vows of all the three of you! There is to no use to regret that which is past. This place of the confluence is very holy. Why should you go to some other place? Make a hermitage here and live comfortably."

Those words pleased Sita very much. Surrounding the hermitage, there were well-laid paths which appeared comfortable. Deer, stags, peacocks, pigeons and a large variety of birds were roaming about the hermitage freely. There would be no strain of forest life. Many sages were living around there. Holy rivers were nearby. Sita is glad.

Rama bowed his head and thought about it. There are many villages around that field. Living with royal comforts all these years and now to live a forest life before the sight of the people everyday…Rama is not willing. He bowed his head and said modestly, "Excuse me, sir. It will really be my fortune to live in this holy place, meditating and doing service at your feet. But there are many villages in this neighbourhood and people may flock here, knowing my presence here, to see me. Because of me the peace of this hermitage will be disturbed. That is not at all to my liking. As my father desired, I shall live away from the crowds. So if there is any other safe place and suitable for women to live in, kindly…." He folded his hands.

The sages thought about that and each suggested a place.

At last Bharadwaja said, My boy! There is the Chitrakuta Mountain some 10 versts from here. Even just the sight of that mountain, a sinful attitude in man will perish. A pious tendency of doing piety will spring up in people. There the sages can perform even arduous meditation very easily and sportively, with legs upturned standing on their head. They perform the feat of standing on the skull, doing immovable meditation. Though all the hairs of the head drop off and only the pate remains, they will ascend to heaven along with the body. It is such a holy place! Sages in large numbers stay there. So Rama, it is better for you to live there. Thus, he described the greatness of Chitrakuta Mountain.

One of the disciples of Bharadwaja, a young one who had not yet learnt modesty and obedience said, "Then we too shall go there, preceptor god! If Chitrakuta is so holy, why should we continue to stay here, preceptor god?" The disciple put to him an uncomfortable question.

"I cannot say why, my boy! Some how we are accustomed to this hermitage", said

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60. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 54, sloka 16: Why did Rama, who eats all kinds of meat in the forest life, say that he would practice Dharma (virtue) by eating roots and fruits? Is eating meat in the ascetic life 'Adharma' (unvirtue)? If he stops eating meat and lives solely by roots and fruits, he could say about it specifically. Is there any sense in saying that he would lead an ascetic life by eating roots and fruits, while actually killing animals and eating their flesh? ★

Bharadwaja who had conquered mundane desires, and saw the surroundings of the hermitage fondly as a householder would see his riches and belongings.

Rama bowed in humility and asked, "Sir, in that Chitrakuta Mountain will…. tigers….lions…just to know because Sita may get frightened being a weak woman…" saying so, he folded his hands.

"No, my son! Monkeys, baboons and bears abound. All those creatures are meant for your service, aren't they? There are elephant herds, and flocks of peacocks. Honey in plenty. There is no dearth of sweet fruits. There are no people there.."

Young disciple had a desperate desire for honey but he smacked his lips and kept silent.

Rama liked it very much. There are no lions there, no illiterate villagers only sages. He decided to go there.

The moon rose from behind the trees. Sita raised her head and saw that. Her cheeks are glittering.

Rama was *drowned in spiritual discussions* with the sages that night.

Lakshmana ate what the sages gave him and slept comfortably.

The following day Bharadwaja told the details of the path to Rama before they started off and walked accompanying Rama to some distance. "There is no need to fear. There are no cruel animals. You remember the entire path I have told you about, don't you? — Make a raft and ferry across the river. Don't forget to salute the *Syama* (green) tree. After that go straight along the bamboo grove…No fear, the path is good. I visit many a time the sages in Chitrakuta. Go on, carefully," so saying, he returned.

Lakshmana, Sita and Rama continued walking.

Two Brahmins, who had started from the hermitage, with alms pitchers, were walking at a little distance from Rama, whispering.

"These are sons of a King! What is this carrying a bundle? Can't they gift it to some Brahmin?"

"They will do so, they will. Just walk some distance. They will unable to carry it and they will surely gift it to us"

All of them reached the place of the confluence soon. Walking along the shore of the Yamuna, Rama said, "Lakshmana! Has not the sage told us to cross the river? Explore where it can be crossed"

Lakshmana looked at the river and turning his head submitted, "Pardon me, brother, sir! I am your slave. If I think about where to cross, I'll become one who thinks independently. Kindly you suggest and I'll make the arrangements."

Rama felt very glad on hearting that and surveying around, said, "All right! I think it is better to cross it here." He then sat down under a tree.

"Yes, sir! I'll do as you command." Lakshmana put down the bundle and load and taking a sword and axe plunged into the business of making of raft. He cut the logs. He cut the bamboo. He cut the creepers of the trees, joined them as ropes, placed bamboos and made knots. It became a raft. He made soft cushions with creepers and hay for his brother and sister-in-law. He pushed the raft into the waters, arranged the whole load on it — "Brother, sir, Please come," he said and stood bowing.

Rama rose, seeing the raft up and down "Lakshmana! Have you knotted the creepers well? Are you sure that they won't get loose? Sita may get frightened. She is a woman, isn't she?" and he looked towards Sita.

Sita was looking at the flow of current joyously.

Lakshmana submitted, "Yes, brother, sir! I have made the raft strong using all my strength."

"Right, Lakshmana! You are competent. You will get fame for our Raghu dynasty" (*by making rafts*), Rama praised him. Turning to Sita he joked a bit, "Sita! Come, sit here! Don't fear! The raft is strong enough. So what do you think of forest life!"

Sita went on to the raft shyly and sat down.

Rama also confidently came on board, while Lakshmana held it fast. "Wicked woman!

She has sent us to the forests! She has thrown us princes into trouble!" So cursing Kaika, Rama sat on the raft adjusting himself. Lakshmana pushed the raft into the current and got on to it, he took into his hand the plank he has carved into an oar.

The alms-Brahmins wondered, "What sort of princes are they? They carry all and have not left us even a single thing." They felt disappointed and putting the pitchers under their arms, went away knotting their tufts of hair.

The raft began moving gracefully. There was a stink of wet bamboos in the air.

Sita was stirring the water with a creeper and sat feeling joy. She was laughing away tickled by the cool breeze.

Rama was about to ask again, "Lakshmana! Have you knotted the creepers well?" But he stopped and looked around. It is wonderful voyaging, floating with a touch on the river, but the thought that he does not know how to swim came to his mind again and again and spoiled that graceful emotion. Looking at Sita, he said, "Are you afraid? Why? The raft is strong." He instilled courage in himself!.

Sita shyly said with a smile, "Why should I fear when a great hero like you can protect me in any calamity."

The raft, about to be carried off with the flow of current, was coming round to rouse with the help of Lakshmana's oar. "Lakshmana! Be careful! Rama, himself being upset, was bucking up in between.

Seeing the waves, Sita vowed with folded hands, "Mother! River Yamuna! On returning to Ayodhya after the completion of the exile, I shall gift away a thousand cows to Brahmins on your banks. I'll donate as much money as they demand. I shall perform the ritual with a thousand pots of liquor." This time Sita did not mention the kingdom. That is an affair of men. What is the use of her vowing? [61]

The raft reached the shore with difficulty due to the rapidity of the current. Rama with one leap jumped on to the shore. Lakshmana also got off and unloaded the luggage. He helped Sita get off.

Again the three started walking along the shore as usual.

After which, a huge Banyan tree came into view. "Lakshmana! I think this is the Syama which Bharadwaja had mentioned."

"Yes, brother-sir, I think it to be so."

That Banyan tree was very old. The mangroves around had also grown into big trees and again released mangroves. That Banyan tree along with the trees extended on the entire area appeared as though the king ruling the forest, held his court there on some urgent state business.

Sita solemnly walked round the tree and prayed to it, "Oh Syama! May my husband successfully complete his exile period by your grace! May I have the fortune of serving my in-laws, returning to Ayodhya along with my husband." [62]

Rama felt satisfied that Sita was always praying for his welfare. Affection for Sita surged up in him. "Lakshmana! You are walking in the front, aren't you? Give to Sita any flower or fruit she asks for, at once", he delegated this handing over business to his brother and so declared his love for her!

"It will be my great fortune brother, sir! I'll carry out your command", Lakshmana placing the basket down, saluted him with folded hands and again picked up the basket and carried on.

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[61] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 55, slokas 20 & 21:** Sita prayed to the river Yamuna. This time, she did not mention the issue of kingdom. She merely expected to return to Ayodhya. ★

[62] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 55, sloka 25:** Sita addressed the Banyan tree as 'Oh great tree, Shyama!" and prayed to it to show mercy that their exile was completed comfortably. Sita, the wife of Sri Ramachandra, keeps praying to trees, stones, rivers and the like. This is how, the human beings in the period of savagery used to worship the oldest trees, hills, rivers, oceans and each and every thing that was huge in magnitude in Nature and believe that they would fulfil their desires. The remnants of those beliefs are still present. These blind beliefs will vanish only when people come to know the scientific knowledge that 'trees and rivers do not fulfil our desires'. ★

The path was beautiful beyond description decked with colourful flowers and trees on both sides.

They walked under the huge trees, from under the twigs of flowers, from under the waves of breeze, moved by the wings of birds.

The bamboo grove was in sight at a distance. Green bamboos with slender leaves were whistling in the wind. The wind intruding into the bamboo bushes, was laughing and making pleasant noises.

Sita, looking at every tree and every mole with extreme joy at every step, lagged behind.

"Sita, walk fast. We have to walk a long distance. We must reach some hermitage, or else the cruel animals.....they said there are no such....but we cannot be sure....who can say? There may be tigers there in such a thick forest as this...why should we face all these difficulties? I have told you, but you haven't heeded", Rama rebuked Sita, as if Sita would feel that it would be better, had the tiger hauled her away, than receiving such a rebuke every time.

Sita looked downcast. "See, there, how the red creeper has spread on the ground" — she was about to say, but lowered her head feeling ashamed. Why these words at every step! Cannot he see how she was enjoying the forests? If there is any danger, do not they have the competence to protect her?" She walked on bending her head with out looking at either side.

Blue flowers on the ground laughing heartily disturbed Sita's concentration. "Sita! You naughty one! You are going without looking at us, aren't you? You can take offence at your husband, why be angry with us?" They quarrelled raising their heads round Sita's feet.

Sita laughed and touched all of them with her hands. "Tyt! No! I am looking at you! How beautifully you have blossomed! I also feel like staying on here", she laughed again.

"Stay on Sita, stay, stay on here. Don't you stay? Oh! Going slowly, don't you stay?"

Speaking with the flowers in the surroundings, laughing and looking at a tree Sita said to her husband, forgetting all that had happened: "Look at those flowers, how beautiful they are!"

Rama did not listen to her. He was thinking about some thing — might be about tigers or Kaika.

Lakshmana dropped the basket down suddenly, put down the bundle, crawled up a tree which Sita was looking at, broke the flower twig with a snap and brought it to her and said, "Please take this, sister-in-law" so saying he handed it to her.

Sita regressing became pale and felt sorry for him, "Oh! Why do you take the trouble? Thinking that your brother would give it, I asked for it." She received the twig. From then on, however charming the flowers might have been, if they were out of reach she walked on without asking for them.

The silk cotton trees were in full bloom and the flakes of cotton were flying in the air. Cotton, floating like snow, was getting entangled on the trees. At some places green creepers were like silk threads on the ground. On their nodes the flowers were like little stars. There is no way to walk without stepping on them.

They walked till noon and halted under a tree. Rama and Lakshmana got absorbed in hunting animals.

Sita wondered on seeing the parrots fully occupying the tree under which she sat. She had never seen so many parrots at one time. Every branch was full of parrots. Cooing, hopping, making noises, how engaging they were!

On other trees there were green pigeons in swarms.

All the birds scattered and flew off in the entire sky out of fear, at the groans of animals falling, hit by arrows.

After eating the baked meat, they rested for some time and started walking again.

Monkeys began to appear in large numbers. They attempted to pull the bundle of Lakshmana, from the branches. When Rama tried to frighten them away with arrows, they dared to drag the arrows. Here and there bears also were seen.

The trees that had been familiar till then in the forest got thin now and new kinds of trees appeared. It was like entering a new forest. There were many *Maddi* trees and *Vavili* trees. The pleasant smell of *Ippa* flowers was strong. Big boulders hidden in the ground, with grass growing on them and creepers spreading on the hillocks looked as though a bed of flowers was made ready for some one in the middle of the path. There were heaps of flowers in the surroundings of the trees also! Here and there the footsteps of various kinds of animals.

"Sister-in-law, look at the footsteps of elephants"

Sita had been familiar with elephants right from her birth. "No lions to be seen", she sighed.

They crossed the streams flowing over the rocky hillocks. At some places only Sita's feet dipped in the streams and appeared like white lotuses. Sita was picking the flowers, which were stuck amidst the stones in the flow of the streams and was letting them float on.

There were *Turayi* flowers in bunches on the branches in full swing as if '*Sindhur*' had been smeared. *Mankena* flowers! Sita let the variety of colourful feathers that she collected in her fist, float in the water at a place.

Peacocks folding their feathers are walking under the trees with arms length tails. Sita is collecting peacock feathers in her lap.

A bear stood under a tree and is drinking drops of honey falling from a honey comb.

Sita is afraid that Rama will take out an arrow. "See this peacock feather eye! How big and beautiful!" She placed that across the face of Rama.

Fast crawling snakes here and there climbing on the trees for the nests of birds, arrows piercing the wings of peacocks, falling of birds to the ground with a final cooing while flying — Sita saw a number of such tragic scenes also. She heard many pitiable cries of creatures. She walked on feeling depressed.

They halted near a lake when it was getting dark. There were lotus in full bloom on the lake. Ducks swimming like boats, avoiding the lotuses and making the waters part on either way, were reaching the shore.

The trees that surrounded the lake were full of cranes, parrots, pigeons, green birds and white birds in flocks, as if it were the kingdom of birds. On the banks of the lake was grass in shrubs like thin wires. With the breeze came the fragrance of the grass.

Sita plucked some grass, squeezed it and rubbed it on the palms and smelt it. It was like camphor once, like ordinary roots once, like *Sampenga* flower once. Sita placed her palms on Rama's face and said smiling, "See, how fragrant it is."

Sita became more intimate with her husband than when she was in the harem. There, her husband used to come sometime in the midnight to the harem, after looking into the affairs of the state. Even if time was available, they had to behave in a solemn way amidst the many attendants. Enjoyment and privacy were rare! Here, these forests and difficulties had brought her husband very close to her. Every moment they could see each other. Any idea could be exchanged. This is real cohabitation (*saha jivanam*)! — "Is the fragrance not pleasing? There is no such grass in any of our parks!" Sita said and saw him wondering.

In the harem, she was shy of looking at him by raising her eyes. She was hesitant to talk to him. Every minute she showed modesty, addressing, "My Lord! Sir!" After coming away from those harems, it appeared as though she had forgotten that awe and reverence — thought Rama and shook his head and kept silent.

In the meanwhile, Sita saw at a wonderful scene and was ecstatic. On the shore of the lake, a peacock had spread the feathers on the tail in full breadth and was dancing in front of the rising moon. In that half transparent moon light, the shadow of the peacock fell on the surface of the lake making the peacock appear like a mountain, standing. Sita, not able to contain for herself so much joy, held Rama's hand in exultation and said, "Look there…the shadow of the peacock…on the waters."

"Lakshmana! Do you think we can rest here?"

"I don't say sir…I am your servant…That much liberty I won't ta…ke"

"Not that! In these surroundings there will be no fear of cruel animals and safety..."

"Don't worry, sir! I hope you do not doubt my *arms strength*. Sister-in-law and you take rest. I shall stay up throughout the night and guard..."

"Yes, Yes! I know! You are that competent! You will bring fame to our Raghu dynasty" (*by guarding*!)

From somewhere came the hooting of a bird. The dancing peacock stopped dancing. Folding its tail feather, straightened its neck and cooed intoxicated, it too echoed that hooting.

"Lakshmana! That peacock looks very fat"

"My Lord..." Sita felt agitated.

The peacock flew after the cooing.

While the moon was ascending, the forest fell into silence.

Rama and Sita sat in the fragrant grass cosily. Fine fragrance in the breeze!

Lakshmana was guarding them at a distance with bow and arrow in his hands.

The lake shone like a second moon in the moon light. The forest dipped into calm silence.

Looking some where, Sita went into ecstasy, "Look there! In the moonlight...all directions....the tops of the trees are shining so beautifully. Seeing this bare nature don't you feel how artificial the gardens are?"

Rama looked around. Moonlight is shining every where! Under the blue canopy the tops of the trees were glittering. Now and then ripened leaves are floating in the air softly. He sighed, "Why does this moon shine in the sky wastefully? That is why elders say "*Moonshine in forests*." So he expressed his displeasure.

Sita looked around in wonder. In such a beautiful forest surroundings Rama's words sounding detachment! She felt very dull. "My Lord! Does moonshine in forests go waste? These animals, birds, huge trees, creepers, every stem of this grass, every petal of these flowers, all insects — don't they all enjoy this moon shine? Don't they in the coolness recoup resting here? Can human beings feel more comfortable than these animals in moonlight? Is there a greater fortune than living in forests dedicated to this moonshine, these flowers and these clouds? Is it an ordinary earth? Some incomparable land of beauty..." Sita is rhapsodic.

Rama looked around with great detachment. "Sita! How ignorant you are! Is this beauty of this world eternal? In a moment all these flowers drop off. All these clouds will change. You are exulting with the moon light but you are not able to understand that a day in your life is going out. Human beings feel glad when it is day, so that they can accumulate money. They feel glad that when it is night they can satiate their carnal desires. That they don't comprehend that, as days pass death haunts and longevity decreases and become aged. With the change of seasons they feel glad that trees blossom and yield nuts, fields give harvest, and the rains come. But they don't grieve that months and years are passing by." Rama sighed.[63]

Sita looked as if not comprehending any thing. When she suggested that he should see the moon without even a single cloud hiding it, her husband was spinning a philosophical note, which caused some strange melancholy in her. Hesitantly, but modestly, Sita asked, "Lord! I realise that the sunrise and sun set reduce one's longevity. However we grieve, it is a natural process, isn't it? What is the use of grieving when longevity decreases in spite of grieving? Sir, is it ignorance trying to fill this span of life with happiness, attachment, eagerness and passion for beauty?" She looked at him innocently.

Rama with the eagerness of preaching knowledge to an ignoramus woman said, "That is why man should meditate over his self, Sita! One should not waste life. In order to get heaven, endeavour must be made in youth itself, if not what piety can we achieve in old age? If we immerse ourselves in joy with these

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63. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 105, slokas 23 to 27: Rama told her in detail about birth and death and the way in which human beings have to make arrangements to acquire heavenly pleasures. Rama expresses the same ideas whenever he engages in discussion on *Dharma*. ★

sun rise and moon rise, this joy will be utterly useless for acquiring other worldly pleasures", said he.

"My Lord! So, loathing the pleasures here is to acquire pleasure elsewhere, isn't it?"

Rama frowned and said, "These are mundane pleasures. They are base. Transitory. Other worldly pleasures are not like that. They are noble. Eternal. Human beings should conduct good deeds to get piety for pleasures in the other worlds. Such of those alone are human beings. Those who are not like that are beasts. What for are the treasures and riches of this earth? What for are these family entanglements that drag men into troubles? Wife, children, friends, and all are bonds that bring them together temporarily and separate them! All is illusion. Family pleasures are pleasures that break down suddenly in the middle." Saying so he shut his eyes.[64]

She felt uncontrollable grief. She had come away to live with her husband, being not able to bear separation from him, his absence and to be able to spend time together as one life, one body whether it was in pain or pleasure. With such a one like her now he says, "Why these family entanglement? Why should man have these transitory bonds? Wife is a myth...Life is a myth...Conjugal relationship is a myth....Every thing is a myth!" Her eyes, filled with tears and were *like overflowing pools*.

"The bond of a husband and wife is permanent without break. It stands eternal in every life." She had heard this many times while Brahmins had recited the Vedas. Now her husband was preaching things differently. Sita had heard many times Brahmins lauding Rama as one endowed with spiritual knowledge and as omniscient. She did not dare question such an omniscient. She leant her head on the grass heap dispirited.

Rama yawned four or five times and cautioned Lakshmana with his wealth of knowledge that forests and lions are not a myth, "Lakshmana! Be careful! This is the fifth day in our forest dwelling. It will be enough if we spend 13 years,11 months and 25 days yet, it will be over. We can return to Ayodhya." Rama gave calculations. In fact for Rama, who says that 'we should feel sorry if one day has passed', it is a matter of joy if the days pass rapidly.

For him sunrise and sunset are pleasing since a day has been spent in the forest life! He appeared to be very happy that five days had already passed.

Just for the sake of safety he looked around and on seeing the moon lit lake, he yawned and said, "Gods come at nights to these lakes for bathing." He drowsily shut his eyes and went to sleep.

Sita raised her head wondering and looked at the sky.

The moonlight disappeared fast.

The stars were shining more brightly.

Off and on star after star fell from the sky.

Seeing that falling of star Sita thought, "Indra of gods might have cursed it." Though she shut her eyes, in a twinkle, she, with a jerk, opened her eyes and looked at the lake to see if gods were present there.

No gods appeared, but some animals came for water and Lakshmana frightened them away through out the night.

Sita's heart was filled with kindness for Lakshmana. The whole day he carried the loads and at nights kept guard without a wink of sleep. When will his difficulties be over? — Her heart melted and she wiped her eyes filled with tears.

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64. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 105, slokas 26 & 27: Family is an entanglement, an obstacle, in the way of man's salvation and heaven! Wife and children are temporary relations that separate after a while! But these principles do not apply to a woman. A husband and family life are not entanglements in the way of a woman's salvation. They are not relations that remain as hurdles. For a woman, service to the husband is heaven. A woman does not have any other objectives to achieve. This means, a woman is not a living being connected with the human kind. Therefore, it is a matter to be discovered by the biologists whether a woman is related to the animal species, insect species or some other new species.

★

Again the sun rose! Again the rising of beauty.

When Sita woke up in the wee hours and went to the lake for bathing, she saw many foot prints there in the wet mud! Animals might have hoodwinked Lakshmana at night and drunk water. What a variety of flowers had blossomed on the lake!

All the trees had woken up earlier than Sita and got ready, decorating their heads with flowers. Red flower trees were burning bright. All the flowers opened their eyes wide and lifted their tiny faces and said, "Mom! Mom! How beautiful the sky is!...What are they flying so well? If we too could fly like that?...Mom! See how this wind frightens me! Mom! Sita has come. She goes away kissing me!..." The flowers invited her, "Look here, Sita! We are calling you! Why are you so haughty? Why don't you listen to us?...Don't you stay here?...Happily, we together... friendly...Come on Sita, don't you?"

Sita roamed around the trees smiling. She cajoled the flowers, "How can I stay? Should I not go along with my husband? You have your mother, I'll return after a longtime. I'll come definitely!...", she promised.

All the three started again.

The forest was getting denser. Trees expanded as if defying one another. Some animal cries and activity was heard nearby. How many fruits there were on the trees! The cashew trees were in full at the top and are filled with the noises of birds. Honey combs were hanging heavily on a number of branches. All around there were cuckoos and peacocks, a Myriad coloured birds, in flocks and the sounds were mixed with roars and shrieks.

That is the world of trees! A dreamland! An unworldly beautiful land! In that land except for the birds and animals, any human movement looked strange! The trees are looking humans as if they were trespassers. "Let those humans go quickly. Don't pick up a quarrel with them! Human beings are heartless and merciless. Let them pass on quickly", as if the forest commanded them thus, wild animals and poisonous snakes were going away avoiding men.

At a distance the peaks of the Chitrakuta Mountains appeared like clouds descending on the horizons covered with fog, like paintings.

They walked on till evening.

In between Sita attempted to show Rama some picturesque scenes, but kept silent many times.

The signs that the sage Bharadwaja had described appeared. At a distance smoke rose from altar fires in the hermitages. Rama looked with eyes wide open. "Lakshmana! We have reached our destination!"

"Yes, brother-sir! By your grace we reached"

The three went to the hermitage of Valmiki. Saluting sage Valmiki, Rama said, "Sage! We are the sons of king Dasaratha. Our step mother has sent us cruelly to these dense forests. My father yielded to a woman and ordered a son like me into this exile. Since I am obedient to my father, I have come to live the in forests with pleasure, Sir!" He sighed.

Sage Valmiki regretted and consoled him, "May be it is auspicious for you, my son! Here you can live with us."

Rama sat leisurely on the earthen platform of Valmiki's hermitage. Paths had formed in the vicinity. Nearby is the river Mandakini. "Lakshmana! This place is safe. My mind desires to build a house. Cut big trees and build house!" so saying Rama leant against a wall.[65]

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65. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 66, slokas 19 & 20: While Rama asked Lakshmana to build a house in one sloka, the poet said in 20th sloka thus, "Lakshmana cut the trees and built the hut". Lakshmana has single handedly built the hut. But Rama did not do any thing — he *did not even move a small stick from one place to another*! Outwardly, Rama and Lakshmana were brothers. But the actual relationship between them was that of a master and a slave. All kinds of labour which slaves do for their masters were seen in the character of Lakshmana. Lakshmana never thought independently and never took decisions independently. He always acted

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Lakshmana saluting Rama said, "It is my good fortune, sir! I'll build a house that pleases you!" He took the axe and got up.

Lakshmana laboured with out food or sleep for a week or ten days.

He cut huge trees. He cut branches. He levelled the ground. Fixed pillars. Lifted the beams. Cutting bamboos he made the roof. He covered the roof with Palmyra leaves, *Maddi* leaves, reed and fastened them with creepers and fibre. He arranged the separate rooms for the deity altar, cooking and a bed room for his brother. He fixed the branches in the ground, plastered them with sticky mud plaster and prepared strong walls along with windows. In the front yard he arranged altars and places for the fire ritual. He cut off the thorny bushes around the house and levelled the ground. He placed bamboo poles around the house, fastened wires and made a fence for protection from the fear of wild animals. To show directions to come easily to the house from the river and hermitages of the sages, he arranged signs with grass and fibre cords on branches of trees all along the path.

The chant of 'service to Rama is good fortune!' rang in his ears always and gave Lakshmana strength to work. Moreover, before doing any work, he remembers Kaika and Bharata and due to his grudge to slay them he got the strength to cut the trees and suchlike.

Lakshmana stood up only after completing the building work. Looking forward for the grace of his brother, who had been discussing philosophical issues with the sages all those days, Lakshmana stood obediently and said, "Brother, sir! Your house is ready. What is your command?"

Rama is very satisfied on seeing the house. "Lakshmana! I am very glad. What more do you require than my satisfaction? Kill a deer and get it. As is ordained in the scriptures, we have to offer a sacrifice to the gods with deer meat and please them", he said.

"I'll get it right now, brother, sir" said Lakshmana and went into the forest with his bow. He killed a black deer, cut the meat, wrapped it in leaves, baked in fire and brought it to Rama.

Rama had his bath in the river, came to the newly built abode and performed worship hailing the vasin gods. He offered sacrifices to extinguish all ills and give peace. "Lakshmana! This is a very auspicious time. House appeasement is completed. The householder will have stability.[66]

Never will there be a need to leave this house", said Rama and stepped into the house along with Sita. "Lakshmana! You are very competent, I must say! You will bring fame to the dynasty of Raghu" (*by building huts!*), he appreciated Lakshmana.

With that praise Lakshmana's body exulted and he continued to work for that house without rest for even a second. He stocked dry wood for cooking. He roamed about in the forest, collected cow dung and dried it. He made soft beds with reed for his brother and sister-in-law. Fetched water from the river, gathered roots or fruits wandering about in the forest, getting ready by baking the hunted meat are routine tasks. He collected dry gourd shells, filled them with honey and kept them on net slings.

Sita learnt how to bake meat in the fire and to bake roots. She was always anxious to reduce Lakshmana's burden of work by doing

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→ according to the master. He always told his brother, "I am your slave! I cannot act independently" and he pleases his master. See how many forms Lakshmana's slavery assumes! It was he who had prepared ferry. It was he who had carried all the bundles. It was he who had built the hut. He will do many more things hereafter. According to the practices that appear here, younger brother is a slave of the older brother. There is no affection in the relationship of these brothers. ★

[66] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 56, slokas 22 & 25:** 'Those who want to live in the house for a long time, must perform the rite of appeasing the evil spirit connected with the house. Only then the householder will have stability', thinking thus Rama performed all the rites. But see later how long Rama lived in this house and how much stability this householder got! ★

whatever she could do.

Rama was engrossed in the daily fire sacrifice, worship, salutation to the sun and spiritual discussions. Rama was carefree to some extent. A brother, who never allows his elder brother to *put foot on the ground* to work, a wife who serve dutifully, a house without any fear of wild animals, birds all around, animals without causing dearth to hunting, discussions of various types with surrounding sages — Rama's mind is restful. The panic in the heart caused by the prospect of the forest life forsaking royal comforts, abated to a large extent, when every thing here is comfortably arranged and he is at peace. "Coming of Sita….more than that coming of Lakshmana, is very good. Service of the brother is achieving piety for Lakshmana" — Rama felt glad. To Rama, who is engrossed in thoughts, Lakshmana offered modestly, the leaf cup filled with honey, "Please take it, brother, sir."

★ ★ ★

Sumantra, who dropped Rama on the bank of the Ganges and returned sorrowfully to Ayodhya after three days — sat in front of the king and narrated in an order each and every thing that had happened during the journey. "Your Excellency! Sri Rama asked me to tell you that he would complete the exile in the forest without sorrow. But Lakṣhmana is furious at you! He said, "Is the person who surrendered to a woman my father? My brother himself is like my father!" Sita is wailing continuously shedding tears. She said some words against Kaika that please her mother-in-law. Now, the three of them have built a hut and are happy. I gathered every thing through Guha's spies", thus Sumantra began to narrate quickly all things both real and unreal.

The wailing of the mothers went up to the skies.

The king cried rolling on the floor, "I have surrendered to a woman! Surrendered to lust! Ugh! Why do I live? Oh, Suta! Take me to my son! I cannot live in Ayodhya!" Dasaratha again rolled on the floor.

Kausalya too did the same thing. She unlocked her hair, beat her chest and wailed with tears flowing from the cheeks like rain water falling from the rain water pipes.

Sumitra, who a long time ago had stopped feeling sorry for her own son, was engrossed in consoling Kausalya.

After some time, the emotions abated. Wailing noises stopped. Again conversation. Again wailing intermittently.

Kausalya abused her husband a lot. His Excellency bent his head and kept silent to every thing that Kausalya said.

After some time, the abuses also became weak.

The king began to narrate a treacherous act which he had committed a long time ago. "We were not married at that time. Once, while I was hunting, I had mistakenly killed the son of a Sudra sage. His parents were blind. They had abused me in many ways. Of course, the sin of killing a Brahmin did not affect me since they were not Brahmins! Yet, will their cursing be abated? I am experiencing the same", Dasaratha resumed wailing again.

He wailed and wailed and finally he died in his sleep one night within ten days.[67]

The next day, before dawn, Gandharvas, singers and musicians, all those who praise and who tell the future had gathered in front of the king's chamber and performed their routine duties as usual.

The maids who clean the teeth and give a bath to His Excellency and those beautiful women who gave medicines to His Excellency were upset as the king had not woken up.

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67. If Dasaratha was a pious person who had done pious acts, why did it so happen that all his four sons were not present near the father? The scriptures say that it is piety if one dies in the arms of one's sons, don't they? Although he had the curse that he would die in the absence of his sons, it is not necessary that all his sons should have been away. He could have died when only one son was away and the rest of them were near him, couldn't he? What sort of pious man is he if all the four sons were away from him during his last days? ★

Finally, the fact revealed itself.

Again there was wailing! The harems resounded! All including Kaika cried.

Kausalya abused Kaika *as if she had thrown dust at Kaika*, "The first support for a woman is — 'husband!' the second support is — 'son!' the third — 'Kinsmen!' You have deprived me of all support! Hereafter, you and your son be happy!"

After the wailing stopped, the ministers preserved the Kings' body in an oil container (*taila droni*).

★ ★ ★

Dasaratha, on the night when he breathed his last, immediately, started in search of 'heaven' with great enthusiasm.

Dressed in white, with hair let loose, he was coughing and jumping. The sky was cool, white and clear. "Where is Rambha?...Rambha?..Where is she? Where is she?" Dasaratha was restless.

He was flying!...flying!...still flying... 'Where is Rambha? ...Rambha?..."

"Come here! Come here! This side...This side..." some voices came from somewhere.

Dasaratha looked around. His eyes were struck with the brilliance. He shut his eyes unable to bear the brilliance.

A very huge tree! The tree extended to all worlds with roots in the Earth and branches in heaven. It was shining with a radiance that could not be seen with eyes. Leaves — emeralds! Flowers — stars! Amidst the brilliance many men, women and men stuck together like dolls and hanging. Dasaratha moved that side gladly.

After some time some, force dragged Dasaratha violently. In one sweep he got stuck to a branch.

"You too for Rambha?"

"Why not? Are all of you for Rambha? I am a king..."

"Well, we too are kings! See, this is a merchant, richer than kings....."

"I have performed many sacrifices, charities...*Aswamedha* sacrifices...."

"We too did. You performed only Horse sacrifices, we made human sacrifices also. But Rambha is not to be seen anywhere here"

"Not here? Well, why not?"

"Why not? What is that question? She is not present here, that is all!"

"No! I don't accept it. She must be"

Somebody cried — "Yes, why is she not present? She must be!" They said in Vedas...Heaven....Rambha..."

"Not even a single sage is seen here, just to put that question to anyone. There, look, a Brahmin is coming. Hey! Come here! This side!"

"Tut! Cannot you be more polite in calling him?" Dasaratha felt offended.

"Politeness! What politeness! We have been lying here for a long time, Yet there is no way out! Hey, Priest! Come here!"

In the meanwhile a Brahmin, who used to attend funeral rites, came straight spreading arms and got stuck to the branch by the side of Dasaratha.

Dasaratha stroking his moustache, tried to move aside, but could not.

"What priest? You talked of 'heaven!' 'Heaven!'...and pestered us all these years tempting us and carried away bundles of gifts, rice and gold. Ultimately, we come here to find nothing. Tell us the truth, man! For that matter, is there any heaven or not?"

"At least is Rambha present here?" — Dasaratha.

That Brahmin turned pale. "How do I know, king? By the time I was born my father was reciting some mystic chants. He was reciting even when I grew up. I learnt all of them. More than that, I know nothing. I too am here with the same expectation of meeting Rambha...Is she really not there?"

"You have ruined me! Without feeding my wife and offspring I accumulated money and doled out charities to pundits" — Merchant.

"Me? How many sacrifices? How many rituals!..."

"What! Is Rambha not really present here?" Dasaratha was turning pale.

"If not, do you think I am playing jokes on you which are intended for Rambha? What Rambha, deceitful Rambha! All right, if not, let it be...."

"Not that man! Tempted by this heaven I exiled my eldest son to the forests!"

"You have done a good thing. You did it not for gaining heaven, but for Rambha…you were tempted for her…"

"That's all right, man! I have been saying that! By the by…."

"No by the by… There is no Rambha here. All right?"

Dasaratha was downcast. "Is that so? Is it true? Oh! My eldest son, who used to salute me with a bow with every minute, who always stood with bowed shoulders humbly, who could conquer enemy kingdoms heroically who was an adept in state craft and cunning craft, who used to enquire about the welfare of relatives and friends as the welfare of the sons born to *legitimate* wife, who used to obey his father's word — him I have sent to the dreadful forests! — What deceit? They talked of truthful words! Cow worlds! Heaven worlds!"

"No such worlds except *burial ground and pall cloth*! Hey, priests why do you look with staring eyes like that? Why don't you speak?"

"I have told you king, sir, I don't know anything."

"You say that here! did you ever say that there?"

If I had said that, would you have kept quiet? You, king? Branding me as an atheist, you would have broken my limbs in to pieces."

"So, this cheating…."

"Cheating…Cheating…why do you catch hold of me?…For my livelihood I picked up a few general ceremony chants. You blared 'Vedas', 'Vedas' and have done it for your piety. Have you ever done it as mercy on me, 'Alas! A poor Brahmin! How does he eke out a living!' and gifted me anything out of pity?"

"Note this! Note this! This priest too had acquired such daring!…Have we not given charities to poor Brahmins, eh?"

"Since it is written in the Vedas that you get piety by giving grants to Brahmins, you have done that. Have you ever made any grants to help us overcome our poverty? If not, why didn't you give charities to beggars as you gave us?"

The kings turned pale, with *gasping mouths*!

Then a great seer, a saint with an arm long beard and moustaches, came straight and got stuck to the branch. He struggled like a fly in a spider web.

"Hello sage! At least you tell us, why there is no heaven?" — this time Dasaratha himself asked him in anger.

The seer closed his eyes and stroked his beard. "There will be, my son! It must be!"

"Look! Stop these crazy and stupid words. Don't try to escape as you have done there!….Where will be Rambha? At least take us with you to that place! Show us Rambha!"

"Where can he go now? He too is stuck here like us!"

"Me? Here? I am a great sage!"

"Hey, seer! What are you muttering? Speak louder. No word is coming out of your bushy beard. You carried away piles of gold from us…told us that there is heaven….."

The sage got very angry. "What are you prating on about, king? Control your tongue. Have you given a single pie that you earned by your hard work? Whatever you gave and whatever the quantity, you got that by squeezing it out from the people! You enjoyed your royal pleasures and we took our charities. You talk as though the whole fault is ours!"

"Ugh! Keep quiet! What is the use of fighting now? Just tell us, sage! We are asking you out of curiosity. You say there is no heaven at all. Is it not anywhere?"

"Why not, lad! Inevitably….":

"So again the same prattle"

"Oh! You keep quiet, king Dasaratha…"

"I won't! Finally let him tell us"

"We won't trouble you, seer! Tell us the truth…Heaven…Rambha…Rambha is enough! Who wants heaven….?"

All were looking for Rambha! To flirt with Rambha! With a Rambha who exists nowhere!

The sage looked around and said, "Really I don't know, king! Since it is mentioned in the Vedas, I thought there is a heaven. Do you say it is not actually there?" The sage expressed astonishment.

Dasaratha beat his pate, "Alas! Really you don't know, Brahmin"

"Speak a bit more politely, king! Me, having performed arduous meditations in dense forests...."

"Enough, shut your mouth! Your ascetic words and you! What use is that meditation? Of what use? You are asking us whether there is a heaven or not!"

"Sage, sir! Don't bother about the king's words. Without knowing any thing why did you do that meditation? Meditation...doing it...You have made your body a skeleton? Fasting and dipping, in water... in fire... on trees and on hillocks, with head down and feet turned up...Oh! Why did you suffer so much hell like torture?....We, at least enjoyed ourselves, had pleasure freely! You didn't have that much even!"

The great sage felt like crying loudly. He was unable to think where that heaven was. The mind was not ready to acknowledge the truth that it does not exist at all!

One man, while talking, vanished in the branches and was not to be seen.

New people were coming and getting stuck to the branches and leaves. Great kings, beggars, labourers, great men and great virtuous women — all were becoming powerless under its attraction.

"Look there! You know that man who is coming here? Do not look that side. It is very sinful! He is an arch atheist", said one sage, hanging from a branch.

Everybody looked that side. That atheist had not got stuck coming in a sweep. He was walking perfectly in the air, he came there laughing, put his hand on a branch and stood there.

"What? Why have all of you halted here, why?"

"Why! You too have halted?"

"No, I came to see you. I have to go now", so saying, he removed his hand from the branch and was about to go away.

Every body looked at each other in disbelief.

"What? That hand has not stuck to the branch?"

"You see it for yourselves", the atheist moved on.

"Hey, Atheist, sir! Please wait, just a word! All of us you know performed innumerable holy deeds, meditations! What is this distressful situation for us? But, you..."

"Who have done many sins," laughed the atheist.

"This is very interesting! Will you get piety even if you have committed a sin? What are those sins?" many asked eagerly.

The atheist looking at Dasaratha said, "Don't you remember what my sins are! That I don't believe in god, I don't observe the distinctions of caste or family race, I don't worship and practise rituals, I propagate atheism you alleged, judges conducted trials and punished me in to exile. Don't you remember? You ordered the judges to mitigate the punishment if I confessed and admitted my fault and offered remorse. I opted for exile and left the country. Those are my sins. Later I died of old age."

"Yes, yes! I remember. Then, after having committed so many sins, you are..."

"Yes, I am free!"

"How did you get that freedom which we don't have?"

"Since I know the value of freedom which you don't know I walk on my feet. I see with my eyes. I think with my mind. I don't suppress my doubts believing what fathers and grand fathers have told me, as you did. That is the basis of my freedom."

"Oh! Every thing is the reverse here. Then you say you wander freely in all the worlds, have you seen heaven?"

"At least Rambha?"

Atheist laughed, "When there is no heaven or Rambha anywhere, how can any one see it?"

Every body felt depressed. "Then did you know before hand that there was no heaven!"

"Yes, I knew that pretty well. Okay, I'll go now"

"Oh, please wait for a while! We have to ask you many things. What is this tree? Why has this imprisoned us?"

"Have you not yet understood?"

The sage looked at the face of this atheist reluctantly from behind and entreated him, "Look here! Kindly won't you detach me from this branch?"

"Me too..."

"Both of us too..."

"I won't detach any body. Freedom is not something which others give. If you really want it, you yourself will achieve it. With your mental stamina you will come out of this poisonous tree"

"What! Is this a poisonous tree!"

"Have you not realised its nature even after it has imprisoned all your limbs, extinguished your freedom and made you so powerless? This tree is nothing but your faulty ideas. You are in its spell."

"It shines so splendidly"

"What if it shines? What good did it do to you? As long as its glitter and brightness deceive you, your lot is the same. It will not act on those who realize that it is a poisonous tree. Realisation does not mean simply uttering the word. Try to remember the lives you have spent. Question all those of your meditations, your rituals and sacrifices, your rule of kingdoms, your caste divisions, your virtuousness, your hell and heaven and their myth and reality. Think how you became slaves and to whom by overlooking the doubts that you had, and how you stifled logical thinking. If you repent on seeing your faults and realise the futility of your rituals, sacrifices, your charitable deeds and understand that your lives too went in the wrong track as your slavish mentality, then you will be free from this poisonous tree. All right, now I'll go."

"Where will you go?"

"I will roam in Nature. I will live in Nature," he said, moved about the air and flew away.

Everybody plunged into deep thought.

After a while Dasaratha said, "What suggestion is that 'to think well'. I don't find a single mistake I made however much I think", and looked at the face of another king.

"Me too, I cannot find any fault. Should I repent now saying that all the sacrifices I made were wrong. Well!"

"My meditation too is a fault, he alleges! But how different can be his atheistic words!

"I ordered him to leave the country, but should have tortured him to death, that was my fault", Dasaratha repented. "Only that fault is obvious", he regretted.

"It is all your fancy. He does not seem to be afraid of even torture or lynching"

"Just aside between us, these atheists are very daring!"

A virtuous woman came there crying out, "Lord! Master! Husband!"

All looked that side.

Except for turmeric on her whole body nothing else was visible. She came flying like a heap of turmeric and got stuck to a branch. "My lord! My lord!" she was saying and looked around turning her eyes.

"What is your difficulty, woman," some body asked irritably.

"I have come away after *closing my eyes at the feet of my husband* with turmeric and vermilion. I am looking for my husband"

"Do you still think he will come? By this time ...with a new wife...."

"What? With a new life?"

"Why that astonishment? On the day of the final rites after the earlier wife was gone, if he remarried it was holy and fulfilling."

"Then our conjugal bond?"

"For bond? It will remain"

"Alas! His health too was not good"

"On seeing the new wife every thing will be set right"

The loyal wife had tears in eyes. In the meanwhile a man came coughing and got stuck to a branch near the loyal wife..

The loyal wife face brightened up. "So you have come, my lord! Your second marriage....All that was empty talk, sir"

"At last it has become empty. The alliance was made but....Over night I had this gasping. On the day of fixing the match I sent her a gold necklace also"

"What? Did you give away my gold necklace? What a 'nice' thing you have done! Whether you remarry or not off. Who allowed you to touch my jewellery?"

"Why not? When my first wife died, did

you not wear all her jewellery and enjoy? In the same way…."

"If that's what you say! All right, then go ahead and say so"

"By the by, Rambha is not to be seen anywhere. When does she come?"

"Why do you need Rambha? I, your duly wedded wife, am here. Aren't I?"

"Even in heaven your nagging? Enough…."

"Yes, now I understand your character. Your mind has always been like this. What have I benefited by being a loyal wife?"

Somebody with vexation admonished, "Why do you quarrel? This is not heaven and there is no Rambha here. Keep quiet."

"Then where is heaven? Should we go further?"

"Well, If we knew that why would we get entangled here?"

"Oh! Yes! Why are we entangled here?" the loyal wife looked around.

Every where around some people came in to sight and some people disappeared.

Another aged loyal wife began to say quickly from a distance with a shivering voice, "Sister-in-law, a gentleman said that we did not think freely with our brains! He said, we had not lived independently! I don't know its name, poison or some thing….he said that we lived as per its direction! That gentleman prattled some thing and went away before you arrived….."

In response to that old woman, this woman *pressed her cheeks* as a sign of surprise and said, "What is freedom for a woman? Who said that? Why didn't you cut his tongue off? In my childhood many Vedic scholars used to visit my father for discussions in our birth place. Do you know, what nice words they used to say? That a woman should have as her master her father, husband or son and a woman should not be independent. What beautiful verses they recited!" She kept *pressing her cheeks* in wonder as before.

"It is said that was a wrong thing. If we confess that living like that was wrong…."

"That is too much! Do not speak any further. I cannot bear to hear..."

The two faithful wives vanished the next moment.

The poor Brahmin who conducted death ceremonies had been struggling with his thoughts since he heard those atheistic sermons. Gradually his face blossomed. "Yes, His words are true! All these years I lived in ignorance and stupidity. Sacrifices, caste distinctions, heaven and hell — all these are false. If these were absent, all human beings would live with great freedom. Now I understand. I wasted my life by the chanting of mantras connected with death anniversaries. I would have lived in a good way if I had cut grass and sold it or given tuitions to a couple of students". As he was saying these words, he was separated from that tree.

"I will live in Nature," he said with great joy, he went away walking free.

"Where is Rambha?…Where is Rambha?…." again somebody was coming crying.

"Come here! Come here!…." The people on the tree called him.

Millions and billions of people were coming and getting stuck like insects to the poisonous tree which was shining with glitter. All were human beings. There was no animal there. Not even a bird. Neither was there an ant. A soul, which was extinguishing in the branches, was about to say, "This really is a poisonous tree. The glitter and shine of the tree is all false. People don't get any pleasure from this. After realising this, a man wanted to cry, "Don't come here. Don't come here." Instead he cried, "Come here, here. All our ancestors have come here. They have trod this path. How beautiful it is, here! You may eat all the fruits. See, how fragrant these flowers are…Come on …." While shouting, he disappeared.

Again somebody... "Where is Rambha?…Where is Rambha?…"

"Come here! Come here!…This way!"

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All the ministers assembled round Vasishta and discussed.

"In a country where there is no king clouds do not gather. Rain's don't fell. Crops don't grow. Trade does not take place. Journeys are not undertaken. Wives and sons will not be under control. Fear of thieves will increase. Atheists will revolt in the absence of punishment by the king. Even Brahmins deviate from the customs and norms. Anarchy prevails where there is no king. The king alone protects everything — virtue, justice, duty etc. Therefore, we ought to make a person of the Ikshvaku dynasty as the king", they resolved.

Messengers who could ride fast on galloping horses very fast set out for Bharata — taking all gifts.

The condition was that no news about Ayodhya should be communicated.

It took a week for messengers to reach the Kekaya kingdom. By that time, Bharata was immersed in sorrow since he had had a dream the previous night. In his dream, he saw many bad omen: that his father had spread out his hair and had fallen from a hill top into a dung pond; was drinking oil with his palms; was going in a procession sitting on a donkey; that the seas had dried up and the moon had become dim and so on.

By then it was ten years since Bharata had been in his maternal grand father's place. He had gone along with his maternal uncle immediately after his marriage and had not returned.

The people who came from Ayodhya did not tell Bharata about Dasaratha's demise. They did not tell that news even to his grand father and uncle. Apart from that they carried ornaments and clothes worth 30 crores for Bharata's grandfather Kekaya and uncle Yudhajit.[68]

Bharata enquiring the news of Ayodhya asked those messengers, "Are all well? Respected father, my brothers are they all right? Are my elder mothers Kausalya and Sumitra, who are rich in virtues, safe? How is my mother, who is wicked, obstinate and deceitful?"[69]

The messengers looked at each other's face.

"All are well. Goddess Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, is selecting you. You have to perform one important task in Ayodhya. Vasishta has sent us. You have to start immediately", they hurried him.

Bharata went to his grand father and informed him of his departure for Ayodhya.

King Kekaya felt glad and gave Bharata many gifts. Diamonds, gems, ornaments, clothes, horses, elephants, camels, chariots and some heroes also to Bharata.[70]

Bharata started for Ayodhya along with Satrughna.

Bharata reached Ayodhya on the thirteenth day of the demise of Dasaratha and proceeded at once to his mother.

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[68] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 70, sloka 50:** There is no clarity whether those 30 crores are rupees or any other coins. The messengers ought to have told king Kekaya, at least confidentially, about Dasaratha's death. Guess why they have not told. ★

[69] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 70, sloka 10:** Without knowing any thing that had happened in Ayodhya, Bharata was abusing his mother meanly. That too in front of the messengers. Did all people have a bad opinion of Kaika in the past? No there was no such thing. Rama himself acknowledged many a time that Kaika was a great woman and she loved him. Then what was the basis for the prattling of Bharata? The poet was very hasty in making Bharata abuse Kaika! Bharata would any way scold Kaika after he reached Ayodhya. But the poet was not able to wait until then! He initiated the action of abusing here itself! Utter irrelevance! ★

[70] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 70, sloka 21:** We can see that, like money, grain, ornaments, clothes, horses, elephants etc. human beings were also given as gifts or donation. If it is soldiers they are used in wars. If they are servants, they serve. Bharata could keep those soldiers under his control or can give them away to others if others need. ★

Kaika exulting on seeing her son drew him near and asked, "O! My son! How are you! Are all well there?"

Bharata narrated the important things of his grand father's place and asked, "My father is not seen! Where is he?"

Kaika was silent for some time. "My boy! Don't grieve! Listen bravely! Your father attained that stage which all creatures reach in the end. He has left this world"

Bharata understood what had happened. "Alas! Alas! What a terrible thing has happened! Has my father passed away? I have become a child without father! Alas! Who will fondle me now! — Alas! The bed my father lay on is empty now?... Alas!...Whom do I have now!" so he wailed for some time as per custom. "My elder brother is my father now! Call him. Saluting my brother, I will fill the gap of the absence of my father", he blared.

Kaika said calmly, "My boy! Rama has gone to the forests with Sita and Lakshmana."

"To the forests? Why?"

"I will tell you in detail. Listen. Your had father had arranged a coronation for Rama. Since your father had made me a promise earlier that the Kosala kingdom would be given to my child, it became your right. I reminded your father of the same promise. But your father refused to keep his word. Then, as there was no alternative, I demanded the two boons which your father had granted to me long ago during a battle between the gods and the Rakshasas — to give kingdom to you and exile Rama to the forests."

Bharata listened to all that with astonishment. Hearing that he was the rightful claimant for the Kosala kingdom was new and a surprise to him.

Bharata did not know anything about the right of a kingdom right from his childhood. Neither his grand father, nor his uncle, ever had told him about that issue. Everybody depended on the truthfulness of Dasaratha. Bharata was not at all aware of it, that he had the right to his father's kingdom. He never had any thoughts about the kingdom, nor any conspiracies. No precautionary measures. In fact he had never had the wish of becoming the king. In such a situation, though the entire kingdom had come to him, he felt loathsome of the wealth and riches that had come to him, because due to his right of kingdom his brother went in exile and his father deceased. If there were no calamities of any kind and he got the kingdom by another way, he would have felt happy, but these consequences gave him no happiness.

"Alas! What a terrible thing my father did! Had he called me and asked me about it, I would have happily agreed to give up the kingdom! Why did he do like this?"

"My child, why does he need to ask you? Had he asked me, I would have happily agreed, wouldn't I? But, your father does not have truthful behaviour, my child! He saw to it that Rama's coronation was done secretly. It would have taken place if I had waited for even a day. That is why, I felt very unhappy. I insisted on carrying out his promise or give up his vow to truth", said Kaika.

"Alas! What a terrible thing has happened", Bharata lamented in many ways.

Right from his childhood Bharata too had grown up with respect for the family lineage and was intoxicated with the stories of the reputation of his father, grandfathers and great grand fathers. He saw the eldest kings of the royal families ruling kingdoms being eligible for the kingdom. He had a lot of reverence and respect for such customs. Now if he took the kingdom all of a sudden, his tradition, faith, duty, ethics and all would appeared as though they were mocking him, "Will you take the kingdom defying your eldest brother Rama?" So he felt ashamed. The daring act his mother had done for his sake looked very gruesome and highly sinful. He got terribly frightened that the world would accuse him that all this had happened because of him.

He did not find fault with his father although his father had violated his promise which he had made a long time ago with regard to the kingdom and had taken the path of untruth. He found fault with his mother who had defied his father. Defying a husband appeared to him a great sin.

Loathing his mother severely, he cursed her with abuses that no scriptures or codes permit.[71]

"Wicked woman! You have ruined our lives. You have descended to bring ill name to our family. Not being aware that you are a poisonous snake my father took you as his wife. You turned against him and bit him. What loss would you have had if my elder brother had taken the kingdom of my father! Who are you to come between a father and a son? How can we feel proud when so much has taken place among brothers for the right to a kingdom? You have Killed my father and you are alive. I would have felt glad, had you died. It is my misfortune that I was born to you", so he went on, feeling that the more he abused his mother, the better name and fame he would get for his family and he cursed his mother to the best of his ability.

Kaika listened to all that calmly. "My boy! I know very thoroughly the honour of your family that makes promises and breaks them. I know the prestige and fame of your father and his sons who conspire secretly with plots. Being a mother, I could not bear passively to look at the injustice being done to you, so I acted as per my right. I have fulfilled my responsibility of keeping the throne ready for you. You do whatever you like with your kingdom. It is not late even now. If your family honour is 'going to back out on a promise made'' sustain that.

"Your father died of old age and not out of love for his son. Forsaking a son for fear of heaven, your father's love for his son became evident. There is no need for you to grieve over the death of an old man, whose life span was over. If you want to dole out your kingdom out of your charity and grace, it is your wish!", so saying Kaika went into her chamber.

Bharata fell into deep thought. Finally what he decided was to hand over the kingdom to his elder brother and in that way exhibit his virtuousness, good nature and fraternal love and get fame in the world.

Meanwhile Satrughna caught hold of Manthara, dragged her and was ready to kill her. On hearing Manthara crying, Kaika tried to dissuade Satrughna.

Ignoring step-mother's words, Satrughna began to chase Manthara. Bharata warned Satrughna, "We should not kill women. I would have killed my mother for her vile act. But I gave up the idea since the great man, our elder brother might get angry."[72]

Bharata wanted to meet his elder step-mother and went at once to her chamber. Though she knew that there was no fault on the side of Bharata, Kausalya with tears gushing, insimulatingly began, "So, you have come, my boy! Your mother has got ready the kingdom for you without any enemy trouble. She drove my son away to the forests in a loin cloth without any cause. Will she not drive me away too? What need is there for any body to drive me out? I shall go away myself, taking the dead body of my pious husband along with Sumitra to my son. Please leave me in the forest where my son spends his days in meditation, my boy! Since you desired the kingdom over flowing with wealth and riches…Your mother has done this wicked act and acquired it for you!" So she talked harshly and wiped her eyes, looking to see what Bharata was thinking.

Bharata wailing aloud, prostrated at the feet of Kausalya. "Alas! Why do you blame me, elder mother!? Shall I do so much injustice to my elder brother? Shall I not fall into the most cruel hell if I had any part in the sin committed by my mother? " On seeing him cry like that, Kausalya picked up her confidence. Since Bharata had not felt happy with what his mother had done, he would never accept the kingdom. Anyhow he would pass it on to her son. Now, let us see under whose authority Kaika would be — Kausalya felt relieved with such thoughts.

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[71] **Ayodhya kanda, sargas 73 & 74;** All the slokas are abuses which Bharata uttered against his mother in front of ministers and servants! The Raghu dynasty is such a great dynasty which has the skill to utter so many kinds of abuses against a mother! It is the greatness of the poet of the *Ramayana* to create the character of such a son!

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[72] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 78, slokas 8 to 22:** Bharata's words: "I would have killed my mother. But Sri Ramachandra will be angry."

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She, with an intention of not spoiling the chances of her son by talking harshly to Bharata, changed her attitude. "All right, my boy! Our lot is this much. What has your mother done, as a matter of fact? Somehow, on seeing you, I spoke out of hurt feelings. Don't keep that in your heart. Kindly send me away to my son, my boy! We will all live some how, eating herbs or roots. How can we get riches and pleasures even if we desire them? — she shed tears in a gush.

Kausalya saw clearly how Bharata was moved by her talk. She had been telling Sumitra right from the beginning that Bharata would not accept the kingdom.

On seeing Bharata's attitude, Kausalya's face gleamed with pleasure, "Don't worry my child! Every thing is predestined", said again.

Bharata abused his mother in front of his elder mother and took leave from her, weeping.

On seeing Bharata's grief, Kausalya fainted out of joy that the kingdom hereafter would be her son's.

Sumitra began to serve her elder sister, with tears. This woman has been serving this elder sister since she came to this house and her son has been serving this elder sister's son!

Sumitra has neither cleverness like Kaika nor worldliness like Kausalya. She learned only to follow her elder sister.

Kausalya still preaches sermons that make Sumitra yield to her. "Don't worry that your son had gone to serve my son. He will get piety if he serves elder brother, you know!" Kausalya often says to Sumitra.

We do not know what Sumitra thinks: about the piety, fame or some thing else that her son would get, but she feels happy for every thing.

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Bharata performed the funeral rites for the mortal remains of his father and made large-scale arrangements to set out for his brother.

Learning that the elder brother had gone in the attire of sages, he too wore a loin-cloth, but boarded the chariots of kings and accompanied by all retinue and elders of the town left for the forests — squeezing all sageliness into his clothing.

The spies of Guha told Bharata the direction in which Rama had gone. Bharata's army and chariots crossed the Ganges by Guha's boats. Then they reached the hermitage of Bharadwaja and from there left for Chitrakuta.[73]

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The peaks of Chitrakuta Mountain were

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[73] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 91:** When Bharata reached Bharadwaja's hermitage, the sage hosted a big feast for Bharata. The description of that feast goes like this: Bharadwaja chanted 'mantras' and invoked Viswakarma and gods. "I want to arrange hospitality for Bharata tonight. All of you come and help me. Build houses! Get ready every thing to eat and drink! Let all rivers on this earth be filled with liquor, drinks, sweets and come here! Let *Chandra* (Moon) come here and prepare the food, liquor and garlands of flowers", Bharadwaja called the gods with their individual names. As soon as Bharadwaja finished his meditation, all the gods arrived individually. A soft breeze blew. A Rain of flowers began. Godly musical instruments were heard in all directions. Heavenly nymphs began dancing and singing. The *Chaitra Ratha* (garden) of Kubera arrived with many fruit trees. All rivers arrived. Mansions, temples and cabins of worship were ready promptly. Brahma sent 60 thousand nymphs. Bharata entered a big mansion filled with spacious seats, palanquins, bath rooms, eatables and everything. There he saw a holy seat, imagined Rama sitting on it, walked round the seat reverently. Then rivers filled with *Paayasam* (sweet made of rice, sugar, ghee) and stood in front of Bharata. There were big mansions on the banks of those rivers. (Rivers in front of Bharata in a mansion! Mansions on the banks of those rivers!) →

shining with variegated colours and each spot shone brilliant in its own way. Some were silver, some were like gold, some were like sapphires, some were like white precious stones, some were like shining stars, some were like the brilliance of mercury, shining in all splendour.

If one craned one's neck one could see, how many varieties of trees! *Mamidi, Neredu, Panasa, Chandra, Loddugu, Vegisa, Morati* trees laden with fruits all over the branches, what a variety!

What a variety of multi coloured birds! What pleasant cooing!

Water falls rolling down from the mountains, lakes covered with flower ponds, cool breeze with fragrance, many tribal men and women in pairs were loitering in the ridges.

Rama and Sita sat on a boulder in front of the cottage at a distance amidst trees, talking. Rama looked around and said, "Sita! This multi coloured Chitrakuta is our Ayodhya. This charming Mandakini is our river Sarayu. These trees are our umbrellas. These wild animals are our citizens. These forests are our Kosala land." He imagined the boulder on which they were sitting as his throne and was enjoying the pleasure comparing that locality with Ayodhya and himself ruling it.[74]

Sita was looking at the flowers floating along with the waves in the river.

"Sita! Lakshmana is serving me. You are behaving yourself with great humility and modesty. What more do I require than this, wherever I am!"

Sita is observing two birds sharing one fruit biting it. In between one was pecking the other's beak. That female bird does not seem to be aware of any humility.

"Sita! the *Gandharvas* and *Kinneras* also come here leaving their worlds for the charm of these forests. See how amorously stimulating this solitude is!"

Sita bowed her head shyly. For Rama spending his time alone with Sita was all right but off and on he felt depressed. In Ayodhya, he used to be busy with engagements without a minute's leisure from the time he woke up — with the laudatory songs of harbingers, conversations with friends, dances and songs of courtesans and thoughts sharpened with state craft. He thought out very carefully about which enemy lands could be occupied, how strong the ad-

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→Singers like Narada and Tumbura came and sang in the presence of Bharata. The most beautiful nymphs danced. All the flowers in the gods' gardens appeared in Bharadwaja's hermitage. Some trees turned into players of Mridangas. Some into players of cymbals. Some into servants. All creepers turned into women and served sweets and food to all. On the banks of the rivers — hot water, fragrant paste for rubbing on the body before bathing, tooth brush sticks, scents, jugs, new clothes — everything was readily available. Seven to eight women surrounded each man and rubbed his body with fragrant paste, gave *head-bath* and decorated. There were wells filled with goat meat, pork, meat of deer, peacock and chicken, liquor, white rice, *paayasam*; tanks of date fruit juice, ponds of curds soup; tanks of buttermilk; crores of plates, jugs, long spoons, wooden-plant seats, chairs — everything was ready except soaps! All the soldiers ate and drank *bellyful* (heartily), danced with joy and shouted, "This is heaven! We won't go back to Ayodhya. We will not come to Dandakaranya." (*Pity, how difficult it was at Ayodhya!*) The night passed happily. Nymphs, gods, mansions and all left before dawn. Bharata started toward Chitrakuta. ★

[74] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 95, sloka 15:** Rama compared Chitrakuta with Ayodhya and the wild animals with people of Ayodhya. The praises of sages for Rama that he speaks the truth are true in this regard. He exhibited the attitude of the kings which consider people as animals. Both people and animals are the same in Rama's view. He derives the same kind of pleasure whether he rules people or cattle. What, in fact, is the meaning of Rama's imagination that Chitrakuta is Ayodhya and he was ruling the people of Ayodhya while he ought to lead the life of an ascetic? Why should he bring in the question of 'ruling' in his life as an ascetic? ★

ministration had to be made, the moment he ascended the throne as king. All that had gone like 'moonlight in a forest'. He, who was to rule lands, is sitting like an incompetent person in the forests. — "Sita! I foget that I am deprived of a kingdom when I see the beauty of this forest. It is good that we have come in exile to this forest life. It serves the purpose of obeying father's command and pleasing Bharata", so saying he lowered his head slightly aside thinking for himself, "Will Bharata be pleased really inheriting the kingdom? He may have come back by now. What did he say? Would he not admonish his mother? He must have. All right, things will be known in due course". He again looked at Sita and said, "There will be no melancholy here even if we live for thousands of years. Actually, I'll never be satiated. Let us return content after spending 14 years here in this lonely place." Thinking about the auspicious day of entering Ayodhya, Rama closed his eyes.[75]

Sita went into the house and brought baked pieces of meat in leaves.

Rama on eating the pieces began to describe the taste of meat. "See this piece, how well baked it is! Its liver is very tasty. First try this," he selected the pieces and handed over them to Sita.

Here there is no dearth for lumps of flesh and liver. There was enough meat if they killed a deer or stag. We don't know whether Rama would remember to give Sita any meat when baked pieces of liver were put in leaves in an area where birds and animals are not available in plenty. Here he is giving lumps of meat to Sita.

Sita likes pickles more than meat.[76]

Since pickles are not available, Sita is unwilling to eat meat for every meal. Sita put the meat pieces, which Rama gave her, again in Rama's mouth, laughing.

Rama smacking with noise the liver pieces peered up his eyes and looked at a distance. It seemed as if dust was rising. Deer and antelope were running. Birds flew up into the sky with a hue and cry. There was some uproar in the distance which reached the ears.

Lakshmana had just fetched water from the river, placed it in the kitchen and was getting ready for cutting fire-wood.

Rama called Lakshmana aloud. "Lakshmana! Look there, what is that noise? Has any king come here for hunting? Or is any cruel animal chasing a docile one? Go and check." He put another piece into his mouth.

"Yes, brother-sir! I'll carry out your command," said Lakshmana, and climbed up the Banyan skilfully like a wild animal.

At a distance he saw a huge army was with chariots, horses and elephants. The very first chariot at the forefront had the '*golden tree flag*'.

Lakshmana knew whose banner it was. "Brother, sir! Send respected sister-in-law inside. Put on your armour quickly. Take your bow. Get ready for battle!" He shouted at the top of his voice from the top of the tree.

"Battle? What battle in this forest? What actually is the matter? Who is coming? Look, well," shouted Rama at the top of his voice so as to reach the upper part of the tree.

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[75] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 94, sloka 15:** "I will not be satiated even if I live here many thousands of years." Rama says as if he is very happy with the beauty of Chitrakuta. But in the same sarga, in sloka 26, he says, "I will be satisfied staying here for 14 years." He would have been satisfied with ten years if the exile had been for ten years. With six years if it were for six years. The desire to enjoy the beauty of Chitrakuta remains only until he got the reign of the kingdom. It was all superficial talk that he wouldn't be satiated with even many thousand years stay. See how many days, let alone years, did Rama, who spoke that he was overwhelmed with joy by the beauty of Chitrakuta, stays in Chitrakuta! ★

[76] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 61, sloka 5:** After Rama's exile, while abusing Dasaratha, Kausalya says, "How can Sita, who enjoyed her meal with pickles, eat wild rice in the forests?" Therefore we can say that Sita likes pickles! ★

Lakshmana was simmering with wrath on the tree. He roared so as to reach his brother. "Brother, sir! Who else will come to fight with us? Kaikeyi's son is coming. It seems he is not satisfied with the occupation of the entire kingdom! His mother might have dinned into his ears that no enemy should be left alive and has sent him. He is coming in leaps and bounds to kill us. I can not tolerate. It is only because of him that we have to face so many troubles. You had to give up the kingdom, which we could have enjoyed forever. Why should we ignore such a fellow who has harmed us so much? I won't remain silent. I'll destroy him, his retinue and armies. I'll slain his mother, his kith and kin and his friends and all. All my arms have been unused after the earlier battles. Bharata should die in this battle at my hands.[77]

When all the enemies are destroyed, you will get back the Kosala kingdom. We can enjoy the royal comforts." He was swaying with emotion and stood there shouting.

After Lakshmana said, "Who else? Kaika's son", Rama did not hear any other words. His mind was quickly struggling with the thoughts why Bharata was coming. 'So, Bharata comes here! I have been guessing of it, that Bharata would surely come. He might have rebuked his mother severely. He might offer the kingdom to me. We cannot say! He is an excellent man!' Rama's mind was getting in a turmoil. In between the shouting of Lakshmana, "I will kill him, I cut him", reached Rama's ears. 'What is this man's commotion? Will he spoil the business?'

Rama looked solemnly at Lakshmana who was climbing down the tree in high anger. "What talk is that, Lakshmana? Don't you know that Bharata is an epitome of virtuous qualities? Why are you so angry with Bharata unnecessarily? Has he ever done an iota of harm to you? When he has never done any harm why do you suspect him now of wanting to do that?" said he, and looked stern. Anger had been accumulating in Rama for the past few days. From the time he poured out the grief in his heart in front of Lakshmana, on the night after crossing the Ganges, Rama had been getting angry with Lakshmana every now and then. Rama would have been happy if Lakshmana had toiled unsparingly. He would feel happy as if Lakshmana were his servant and he himself a Lord. Now and then Sita would say, "If Lakshmana had not come, we would have faced many more troubles. How nice he is! How much service he does for us! " — Rama did not at all like Sita saying this. "What is there to pour out so much sympathy in that? By rendering service to me, he will get piety in the other worlds", Rama would say, *putting his face disapprovingly.*

Apart from that, Sita, who never appeared in the presence of strange men in the harem, now is talking with brother-in-law through out the day, seeing which Rama's mind nurtured some pain. Lakshmana was here away from his wife. If he had been in Ayodhya, there would have been many courtesans for him. Now here the world might find some fault. Inevitably one had to fear the world, didn't one? Out of the anger on Lakshmana, heaped for various reasons, Rama had been waiting for an opportunity to rebuke him all those days. Now he had found a good opportunity to scold Lakshmana. Why should he blame Bharata? Now he had found an opportunity to point out the great sin committed by Lakshmana, to rebuke him and to exhibit his own nobility and with eagerness of getting back his solemnity. "Lakshmana! You said you would kill father, imprison him and all such things when we set out on exile. Now, you say you will slay Bharata. Just because we face some tiny danger, should we kill our father and brother? Should you speak out whatever comes to your mind like that? First, should we not find out why Bharata is coming here and for what? He might have learnt about all the terrible things that had happened in Ayodhya after returning from his grand father's place. He might have rebuked his mother harshly and refused to accept the kingdom. Since he has a good tradition, he may have totally refused the kingdom when his older brother has not got it. He may be coming to give me back the kingdom by convincing our father some how.[78] Without knowing the actual thing, why do you talk irrelevant things, Lakshmana? When father proposed it I accepted it not because of my selfishness, you know, it meant for you all. I desired to rule with a view that my brothers may become wealthy and wallow in riches.[79] Believe me, I swear by my sword. You are angry that the kingdom was lost because of Bharata? Do you want to become king yourself to enjoy all the royal pleasures? Tell me, at least that! I'll tell Bharata as soon as he comes here, 'My boy, Bharata! Lakshmana wants to rule the kingdom. Give him your kingdom'. If I tell him so, Bharata will definitely listen to me. He will give you that kingdom. You will then be content.[80] If not so, why do you talk so wrathfully to kill Bharata? For that matter, why do you suspect such a gentle hearted man?" Rama plucked those words out of air and looked angrily at Lakshmana.[81]

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[77] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 96:** See how furious Lakshmana is at Kaika and Bharata! ★

Lakshmana was astonished at the attitude of his older brother and bowed his head.

Sita too felt astonished. Did Lakshmana desire the kingdom? What words were they? Did not her husband know Lakshmana's anxiety to get the kingdom for whose sake? Could not Rama sense why Lakshmana suspected Bharata, for whose benefit? Why did he say such harsh words, to an innocent man! Sita felt ashamed to see Lakshmana's disappointed face.

Though Lakshmana bowed down his head at the rebuke of Rama, his inner voice revolted suddenly, "What? Do I want to rule the kingdom? Do I desire all the royal pleasures for my sake? Don't you understand for whose pleasure I am doing this drudgery? Is this the reward you offer me for my service" — the Inner voice looked Rama defiantly. Rama would have been shocked if he had understood the seriousness in Lakshmana's looks. The inner voice laughed ironically at Lakshmana, "In fact, nowhere will there be a fool in the world like you! Your brother always gives more importance to Bharata! Have you noted that? Egoistic people always respect people who stand on a par with their status, but never respect those who render slavish service. Right from your childhood your brother has been glorifying Bharata while neglecting you. Still you have no sense." Lakshmana's inner voice loathed him further, "He says he will get the kingdom for you. Why don't you take it? Even if you wish for it, how can he get it to you? By getting it, *in which Ganges will he sink* the command of his father? 'Why suspect Bharata?' he says as if demanding an explanation, then why did he suspect Bharata before the coronation? Why was he in doubt if the coronation would take place or not? Will any hurdle come from Bharata?' Then, why did he suspect Bharata who had not done an iota of harm? Ugh! Even now you seem not to have realised your elder brother's temperament!"

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[78] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 97, sloka 12:** Rama too does not know why Bharata is coming. Yet, he is imagining that Bharata may have abused his mother, refused the kingdom and was coming to give away the kingdom to him. Why shouldn't Rama imagine that Bharata has celebrated his coronation as per his mother's suggestion and was coming to see his elder brother? Rama's desire for the kingdom is revealed in his hopes, imagination and words. ★

[79] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 97, slokas 5 & 6**: Rama wanted to rule the kingdom for the sake of enjoyment of riches and wealth by his brothers, not for his selfishness! But not to make people happy! ★

[80] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 97, slokas 17 & 18:** "Do you want the kingdom?" — Can even devotees of Rama tolerate it if Rama asked Lakshmana this? Does Rama not know for whose sake Lakshmana suspected Bharata? What is the need to defend Bharata and scold Lakshmana? Will he not be defying his father's command if he gets the kingdom for Lakshmana, which Bharata ought to rule? ★

[81] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 97, sloka 14:** "Has Bharata ever done any harm to you before? Why are you suspecting some one who has never done harm?" Rama asks Lakshmana. Then why didn't he ask the same question when his father, about fifteen days ago, had called him to his chamber, the day before the coronation and said, "My son! You cannot trust Bharata. There will be a threat to you from Bharata's men. You have to get the coronation done before he comes." Why did Rama not ask his father as he now asked Lakshmana thus, "What harm has Bharata done to you? Why should you suspect him?" ★

Lakshmana, unable to say anything to the inner voice, stood feeling slighted.

Rama hesitated a bit, drawing back that he might have hurt Lakshmana, again dragging him into conversation, with a smile, said,[82] "Lakshmana, actually our father himself may be coming. After our departure to the forests, he might have thought well. He might have realised thus, 'Alas! My sons are such who have enjoyed royal comforts from their childhood! Now it will be difficult for them to live in the forests.' Yes, that must be the case. He may be coming to take us back home. Chariots et cetera are well in sight. Look there…There! Our father's chief elephant also is coming. May be, to take me back seated on it. Look well, father's white umbrella is not there anywhere. I suspect something. By any chance, has he passed away ? What do[83] you say?" he looked in deep thought.

Lakshmana's inner voice became furious, "Don't trust any of his words! He is trying to please you because he has realised that you felt hurt. Who does not know all this drama? Why do you render here so much service as a beast? Don't bother about piety. Let's go to Ayodhya along with those people coming from Ayodhya. Then this lord will realise whether to continue philosophical discussions or cut fire wood", it raged.

The words of the inner voice seemed to be good but yet sounded very harsh. "Enough! Shut up! If I allow you to speak, I can't stop you! Why such rude words? He is my elder brother, older. There is nothing wrong if he scolds me or if I bear his scolding. If not he, who else will admonish me?" Lakshmana also became furious at his inner voice.

"So, someone or other must scold you! Cursed be your life! Already cursed, of course! All right! *Die, as you wish.* I am going away. Question me, if I appear again."

When the inner voice became silent, Lakshmana bowing to his brother sighed, "Yes, brother, sir! No trace of father. He might have passed away."

Rama did not have much thought on that. "All right! We will come to know about it slowly. I'll go inside the hut and sit there. You stand here and be watching what goes on!" Rama rose and said, "Sita! You also come along with me and sit inside." He took his wife with him and walked into the hut quickly.

* * *

The army of Bharata halted at a distance. They stopped the elephants, horses and chariots. Bharata got off the chariot, accompanied by Sumantra, Vasishta and Guha, walked talking about his elder brother. The signs on the branches of the trees showed the path clearly.

Eagerly looking to meet his brother Bharata followed the track and reached the cottage.

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When Bharata arrived, Rama sat en-

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82. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 97, sloka 21: Rama, suspecting that Lakshmana felt hurt by his scolding, talks cleverly.

83. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 97, sloka 16: As the signs connected with Dasaratha are not visible, Rama doubted whether Dasaratha is alive or not. But, see how much importance Rama gave to find out about his father when he enquired about his father after Bharata's arrival.

grossed in meditation on a seat of the sacrificial grass.

Sita sat at the porch of an inner room bowing her head.

Lakshmana stood outside the door in obedience.

On seeing Rama, Bharata and Satrughna prostrated on his feet and began to cry in a gush, “Brother, sir! Brother! Sir.” Bharata sobbing amidst weeping said, “Alas! My brother who was supposed to sit on a throne, the fate of sitting on a sacrificial grass has occurred! For a great king supposed to wallow in wealth and riches the fate of exile in the forests has occurred!” He was crying, talking and crying and rested his head on his brother’s feet.

Rama opened his eyes from his meditation and looked at his younger brothers solemnly, as if he had come to know about their arrival just then! On seeing Bharata, Rama’s mind plunged into deep thoughts, “This man too comes in the attire of sages! What has he done with the kingdom? Has he refused to rule? Or did he say ‘why these comforts which my elder brother does not have?” Rama did not look at Satrughna even by raising his eyes, drew Bharata near him and seated him on his lap, began stroking his head.[84]

Lulling as a grand father would lull his grand son, he began to speak, “My boy! You have changed a lot. It is long since you went to your grand father’s house. I could not recognise you at once on seeing you. Are you all right? You have heard all that has happened in Ayodhya, haven’t you? Your mother kept the kingdom ready for your sake. Why have you come in this attire to this forest instead of ruling the kingdom well? Would the king let you go when he is alive? Has he passed away by any chance? In the grief of my absence how would the king survive, any way? Are all our mothers doing well? Have you been serving father since your arrival? You have come in a sage’s attire. Have you decided to live in the forests? Because of my absence in the kingdom has any enemy occupied the kingdom and are they treating you as a young one? Or have you lost the kingdom because of your incompetence?” Rama started to rain questions.[85]

Though he enquired about his father, Rama had no interest to hear how his father was. Behind the back of Bharata the Kosala throne appeared, studded with nine types of gems, shining brightly. His mind was anxious to ask many questions about the rule of the kingdom. How Bharata was ruling? What irregularities was he committing? Could Bharata do as he did, any way? For that matter, what in fact does Bharata know about state craft to rule well? He had learnt many things with the confidence that he would become king for a long time.

Bharata felt embarrassed since there was not enough place on the thighs of Rama and he was about to slip a bit. Rama held his hand in a grip. “My boy! Are you ruling wisely? Have you known which sacrificial fires are to be performed at what times? Are you worshipping gods, Brahmins and priests? Mainly are you worshiping our family priest Vasishta daily? Do you please our *Dhanurveda Acharya,* the teacher of archery, with gifts?” Rama had a special liking for this *Dhanurveda Acharya*. Rama used to discuss with him state craft. He used to talk about the affairs of the neighbouring king-

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84. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 3: ‘Rama took Bharata by the arm, placed him on his lap and clasped him in his two arms.’ ★

85. The comment ‘started to rain questions’ is not without any basis. In **sarga 100** of **Ayodhya kanda,** there are 79 slokas in which Rama asked Bharata several hundreds of questions. See what he asked about! He has simply asked about his father but observe when he heard the answer for that question! He is not inclined to listen to the answer to any one of those hundreds of questions. He kept on merely raining questions! The rain stopped nowhere. I alone took the initiative and had to stop the questions for some time intermittently in order to explain the situation. In the original all these questions rain continuously. ★

doms. That Acharya used to bless always, "You will become king, my boy! You will wallow in wealth and riches." Rama with a smile used to promise, "When I become king, *I'll drench you* with gifts, preceptor god!"

Recollecting all those pleasant memories, Rama controlling himself looked solemn. "You have to woo elders and scholars with giving grains, money or gems! You know! Have you appointed as ministers people of good descent, intelligence and people who can read the others' minds on seeing their faces? You know, you have to discuss state affairs confidentially with ministers only? You just by yourself should never think about them. Not only that, you should not discuss them at one time with many ministers grouped together. Discuss matters with all together, then discuss them with each individually. Do not think about state affairs deeply sitting alone at midnight? You should not transgress the principles of scriptures!"

In the past, Rama could not get sleep thinking about the problems of politics. He used to think about enemy kings, their strength and weakness, victory and defeat, sitting alone. Some times Sita used to come with drowsy eyes and pray, "It is late in the night! Take rest, my lord." Rama, if he was in a good mood, would go to sleep quietly. Otherwise, he used to say in disgust, "Sita! You are a woman! You cannot comprehend the hard and soft issues of politics. Go and sleep." Remembering those nights Rama was anxious to tell Bharata, "I have never spent nights with the thoughts of politics, you know!" "My lad! Bharata! You intend to achieve a great task with a little effort — you should not be tardy even for a moment. You should carry it out at once..."

Rama's inner voice tried to caution him in disgust 'why do you narrate all these things to him? It is his kingdom, he will do as he likes. There are ministers and priests. They will carry on the state craft. What, in fact, is left for the king to do? Why do you talk as though you are ignorant of that?

Rama got very angry. "Are you still alive? When did you come up from the ankle? Isn't my brother's kingdom as good as being of mine? By the time I reach tomorrow after completing my exile, should any thing remain or not? What will happen if the kingdom is thrown into enemy hands, due to his incompetence and with misrule? The kingdom will survive only if I suggest some cautions. What do you know as to how many enemy kings are in ambush in the surroundings? If the king does not rule properly, if he becomes incompetent, all enemies will attack at once and occupy the kingdom. Do you think that I am preaching all these morals because I am crazy?" he reprimanded the inner voice severely. Rama's inner voice is not as strong as that of Lakshmana. Shrinking its face, it kept silent lacking confidence.

Rama with the jubilation that he was able to convince his inner voice, looked at Bharata with a smile and resumed, "My boy! I have spoken about great achievement with a little effort, I'll explain this point in detail, listen. For example, if some neighbouring king is unable to carry on his state affairs being indisposed or lustful! If the kingdom becomes yours with a tiny attack then do it at once. You should not let your tributary kings or outsiders know about it till it is over. Are there learned people in your court to tell you all these things? There is no use gathering a thousand unwise people. One learned men is enough. He will safe guard the king in danger. By the by, do you worship Suyajna, the son of Vasishta? He is a worthy man, you know!

"My boy! The king must follow a procedure in making appointments in the court or country. People of noble castes should be given good jobs. Middle caste people should be given middle order jobs. Low caste people should be given low category jobs."[86]

Rama intended to effect many changes in the job structure on becoming king. He wanted

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86. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 25: Rama is preaching the order in which jobs should be given. This is politics that tells us to recognize human beings in accordance with the caste hierarchy.

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to implement them cleverly, removing some, appointing new people, pushing down some, pulling some up. But — pity!...."If this order was not followed the distinctions between high castes and lower castes would be erased. So I hope you too are doing that."

All the questions of the older brother were embarrassing to Bharata. He, in fact, wanted to convey the news of their father's demise immediately on seeing his brother. He wanted to reveal that he had no ambition for the kingdom at all. There all the mothers were in the chariots. Many relatives, officers had also come. They were all eager to see Rama. These state craft morals were very vexing to Bharata.

Moving his head up and down, as if saying, "See, how many more things I know", Rama said, "My boy! Bharata! Don't inflict severe punishments on people, you know!"

Bharata *put his face* embarrassingly as if he himself had faced those punishments.

You should also not collect heavier taxes, my boy! I hope, you are not falling a victim to the abuses of people, by imposing more taxes out of greed for money?"

What is this! How many days have passed since his arrival? What taxes? — Bharata lifted his head a bit and was about to open his mouth.

"Some employees knowing all politics try to dig pits against the kings, you know. You should punish such people with death sentence mercilessly. If not, they will become a threat to the life of the king himself. I hope such people are not there in your kingdom."

Bharata again tried to open his mouth.

"My boy! Have you appointed a man as the commander in chief, who can devise various strategies in battles, who is a hero and loyal? Do you honour the heroes who fight well in battle with loyalty?"

Bharata was bewildered. Even by the estimate of his older brother, it was only ten days since he had come to power. In such a short time what was this issue of wars and honouring war heroes? Guha was looking aghast at Rama's face. Instead of enquiring about their welfare on the arrival of his brothers, what were these questions?

"You should not delay the payment of salaries (*veetanam*) to soldiers. They live on their salaries. If they are delayed, they get angry with the kings and scheme to harm in various ways. They may not fight in battles putting their lives at stake. They may join the enemy camp. Either way it is dangerous to the king, you know! There is no need to buy harm if their salaries are disbursed in time. Are you also doing that?"[87]

Though Rama was asking questions, he had no inclination to listen to the answers. With an attitude to preach, "If I were the king, see how tactfully I would rule", Rama was hurrying to say whatever came to his mind.

"You may be oppressing people by imposing harsh punishments. You should not do that, my boy! In such cases your ministers should prevent you. Do you listen to your ministers or not? By the by, have you thought about envoys? Have you made a knowledgeable, trustworthy, native born, man of action as your chief envoy? Have you appointed clever and tactful people as spies?

Sages from other hermitages came to see what was going on there. The officers and ministers, who stood at a distance in the spot where the chariots halted, also came.

One gadfly was humming z,z,z near the ear of Guha. He was attempting to hit that for a long time. He was about to hit when it landed on his thigh, by then it escaped like a tactful spy. Guha beating his thigh severely and looking at Rama in that anger wanted to scold him, "What are all these questions, now, my son! Has Bharata turned the entire kingdom upside down. These ministers and minions have been in the court from the past. Enough, now stop.

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87. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, slokas 32 & 33: Rama is explaining why the king should pay salaries to soldiers without delay. Not that they can live comfortably without any difficulties. Because, they may get angry, revolt against the king and harm him! Instead, Rama says, the king must try to make the army subservient in order to rule smoothly. ★

Look at the present business." The gadfly again jammed his ear. He turned toward the gadfly and its business.

Rama continued questioning, "Do all our Kshatriyas, who are in important positions, have affection for you?[88]

Are they ready with the loyalty of laying down their lives for you if there is need. Do you keep watch, if your ministers, treasury heads and envoys are conspiring with your enemies and hatching plots behind your back? Are you collecting information to know the secret activities and ins and outs of ministers, commanders-in-chief, treasury heads, local administrators by appointing three spies on each.

Bharata bowed his head feeling uncomfortable. All the ministers were sitting in the front of the door way. It seemed that Rama did not notice anybody.

Sita picked up her courage a bit. "Now why all those...." She was about to say. But kept silent as no word came out of throat.

Bharata slowly slipped off Rama's thigh, moved away, and sat there.

Rama, having his thigh crammed, frowned and continued, "You can be very close to priests who are trust worthy to you. Yes...nothing wrong. No harm will occur. This will be a benefit. Another point, if the enemies you have driven out come again after some time — are you carefree thinking that they will do no harm, because they have become powerless? You should not trust an enemy as you should not trust a snake.[89]

Lakshmana's inner voice began laughing boisterously. Lakshmana tolerated this for some time, said frowning, "Why do you laugh so boisterously?" The Inner voice continued its boisterous laugh, "You...also...ah! Ah! Laugh, if you want...Ah! Ah! Why do you try to suppress your laugh? Ah! Ah! Ah! Does not your elder brother know when Bharata came? During these ten days driving out enemies...they coming again after some time...Ah! Ah! Oh! I have *pain in stomach due to laughter*!..." Lakshmana rose from there and went behind the trees on the pretext of easing himself. Standing there he was drubbed down by the inner voice right and left. "It seems you are bent upon dragging me out and not allow me to stand amidst others. What is this audacity? Brother says one must take care of tomorrow, You know? You say you won't interfere with me, but why don't you leave me? Have you no sense? Phew! Shameless creature!"

The inner voice not caring for the rebukes, smiling said, "If you want look at the faces of all. All are turning pale, at your brother's questions. There, people at the back have begun whispering also. But you catch hold of me and rebuke me!" It had tears in its eyes but again laughed recollecting some thing. Lakshmana loitering there, told the people coming near the hut, "Go that side...that side...Forward to those *Neereedu* trees...", he showed the direction. "This time if you laugh *I'll break your teeth*" he cautioned the inner voice and returned to Rama.

The scene is as it was before.

Rama shaking his head "...so doing....doing?" asked. What...doing?! Might be some question, worshipping? Or ruling!

"Are the bigwigs of business following your wishes? Are you arranging everything comfortably for them enquiring after their welfare? A king should protect all, but more particularly the traders. Only if traders do their trade people will be comfortable." Lowering his tone, Rama said, "Traders are a big support to kings." Again with the usual tone: "A king should

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88. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 34: As Kshatriya is a king, Kshatriyas alone occupy important position. They occupy a higher position since they belong to a higher caste. ★

89. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 37: Rama is worried that Bharata may believe his enemies whom he has chased away earlier but who may have returned to the kingdom after some time — All this in a week's time since Bharata had returned from his grand father's place! ★

understand everything. You know, king should have the skill of sensing the minds of others."[90]

Rama moved his head as if he had a lot of skill in sensing others' mind.

Bharata again tried to open his mouth, but kept silent because Rama could not grasp that.

Everybody thought, 'Let him continue like that', stopped their attempts to stop Rama. They settled down and squatted. Some transferred their weight from one leg to the other and some stretched their legs.

Both the ears of Guha were covered with curly hair and looked like bushes and hence the gadfly liked them. None else there had such nice bushy ears. The gadfly was very tempted to enter at least one ear and look there. But Guha did not seem to allow it. He was driving away the gadfly by stretching out his hands and waving it off.

Rama was recounting all the political principles he had read, one from here and one from there. "My boy! A king should have more strength of an elephant army. Since elephants are born and reared in forests, the king should guard the forests well. Have you learnt how to acquire elephants, my boy? We should take well domesticated she-elephants to the forests and attract he-elephants. Have you she-elephants in large numbers? A king should not rest satisfied after acquiring just a few elephants and a few horses. He must acquire a large cavalry force and an elephant wing in the army. Are you also doing that?[91]

"Is our country well? Are you following the footsteps of your ancestors? Are you ruling in accordance with the same codes which they followed? I know, you are a very worthy man. You must be ruling accordingly.

"Another point. When the enemies of a noble man accuse him with a crime of theft or some other thing and got him to you and offered huge amounts as bribe, are you yielding to it tempted by money? Or, are you letting loose a criminal whose guilt is proved, by taking a bribe?[92]

Bharata felt slighted and lowered his face. He was about to ask Rama, "Brother, sir, on the one hand you praise me as a very worthy man and on the other hand you question me, 'are you taking bribes?' What is this?" While he was hesitating to ask, Rama proceeded to ask another question: "I hope you will not do that thing…, will you?" Bharata had not heard properly what 'that thing' which he ought not do was!

Gradually people come and sat.

"When some transaction takes place between a rich man and a poor man, then I hope your ministers don't try to help the rich man for money, do they?"[93]

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[90] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, slokas 47 & 48:** The king has to protect traders specially, says Rama. Why? So that they support the king! This is the most important aspect of politics of the kings. They provide privileges to businessmen and the rich in order to secure their support.★

[91] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 50:** Why should a king acquire a large cavalry and army of elephants? For the sake of waging wars against other kings and the expansion of the kingdom! To keep other kings always in fear and keep them under their control and as their subsidiaries! Of all the kings, whoever acquires more economic and physical force will become the lord of the empire and be able to keep the neighbouring kingdoms in his *fist*. Rama was preaching to Bharata do so. ★

[92] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, slokas 56 to 58:** Rama is making it clear that it is natural even for a Kosala king to yield to bribe. This means, either kings or government officials will commit any kind of injustice for their interest, gain and money. Whatever be the form of bribe, there is nothing that people benefit from this governance of a king who has become corrupt and has aimed at retaining his state power intact. It is an absolute falsehood to say that a king treats his people as his children. ★

Alas! All the ministers are present in front of him! He is asking about their avarice for money in their presence!

Guha was irritated being unable to catch the gadfly. "Enough of it, stop! Why do you '*kill*' the lad like that? You had told me previously these morals. Any one ascending the throne will know every thing. Why this pestering like a gadfly" he wanted to say. In the meanwhile gadfly went to Sumantra. As Guha's irritation abated, he had not said anything.

If you punish the innocent by yielding to the temptation of money and if the innocent's eyes shed tears, it will ruin the king's sons; cattle and wealth. Be careful.[94]

"My boy! You are a good man. Do the people of the villages and towns wish you well? Have all the Brahmin scholars accepted you as king? Did any body oppose it? Have they castigated you, claiming Rama should have become the king and you should not be the king?" I know my boy, you are a victorious man…Another point, my boy…"

Somebody hissed silently.

Guha almost succeeded in catching the gadfly but it fluttered in the fingers and escaped.

People sitting on the edge of the pail went behind the trees, *placing their hands on their bellies*, unable to control their laughter. Lakshmana taking the responsibility of treating them respectfully went out quickly.

Rama's right leg cramped. He shifted on to the left leg. "My boy, Bharata! Are you taking proper care with regard to the women of the harem? Never trust women. Never tell them any secrets. I hope you are doing so.[95]

Sita felt *so insulted that some one slew her head*?. Before so many men, being the only women present there, she felt her life full of shame. Safeguards to be taken to prevent women from outside men? Who is there in harems? All are mothers! Is it proper to insult mothers and wives like this? Rama's talk until then was unpleasant to Sita, now with these words she got vexed with her husband.

"My boy!…Should not oversleep, you know. A king should not be lazy. He should rise early in the morning, attend to the nature-calls, perform the daily fire sacrifices, take medicines, get adorned, go to court regularly? A king should never appear before workers. If a king appears before them, they behave carelessly thinking, "so this is the king!" Workers should be made fearful of the king and should not behave fearlessly. At times of wars, sacrifices and on such important occasions a king can appear before them occasionally and but should talk with them serenely, in order to pacify workmen."[96]

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[93] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 58:** Rama is asking, "Are your ministers impartial? Will they help only the rich?" This means, this practice of taking bribes of the ministers is not related to the present days! So, we need not feel sad about the practice of our ministers. This is a custom that has been in vogue since Lord Rama's period. ★

[94] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 49:** "The tears of an innocent person will completely ruin the king", Rama was acknowledging it. 'Innocent people shedding tears' implies that injustice and improprieties were taking place in the country. Under such rule, people, unable to bear the sufferings, will revolt against the king after some time. They will kill the king. They also kill the sons and heirs of the king. They will completely destroy the luxuries and wealth of the king. The sufferings of the people will themselves cause such a consciousness among people. This is the inner meaning of what Rama is saying although he is repeating the moral preaching which he has read in the scriptures. ★

[95] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 49:** See what restrictions Rama ordered with regard to women. "Don't repose faith in women; do not confide secrets to women." This Rama is a worshiped god of millions of women today! As long as they believe in Rama, women will have to sink alive in the tombs of traditions which Rama preached and die there. ★

He lifted his shoulders, sitting straight with a serious face and looked solemnly. "There is nothing wrong in appearing before ministers and priests on business." He shook his head with approval.

Bharata wanted to say, "Oh! I never want this kingdom, take it yourself" and run away from there. But the gadfly came from Sumantra and caught him. He got busy avoiding it.

Rama was stroking Bharata's shoulder, back or head. "Another issue, my boy! Are all the fortresses full with grain and wealth, arms and archers? Is your revenue high?[97]

Don't give more holidays to employees. There are two kinds of loss from giving holidays. Employees get used to pleasures and frolic. By more holidays, the working time is reduced and the work gets delayed.[98]

That is not good for the welfare of the king. Their demands become endless, if one demand is fulfilled. Bharata felt the need of easing himself. He attempted to get up slowly. Rama pressing his shoulder and caressing it said, "Another point, my boy!….." Whenever Rama said 'another point' Bharata was getting alarmed, "are there still more points?"

Rama's inner voice crept near his ear and said hesitatingly, "All right, You have said many things. Won't you stop now? I have been thinking of telling you for some time, but you are not allowing me even to open my mouth. Why bother about state affairs when you have come away as an ascetic? How are you concerned with whoever rules in whatever manner? Don't you sense what others feel about it? Behind your back some people were talking instead of listening to your words." Rama got irritated. "You don't know the subtleties of the code. You don't heed it if mentioned. Am I recounting all these morals of state for my sake? I am doing so for the sake of the world. You say people feel about it! How foolish you are! Don't you know that any word uttered by Rama becomes pious. The people behind your back may be talking about my thoughtfulness or my divinity. Look, don't annoy me any further. Don't make me angry, who never gets angry", Rama said in an irritated voice.

Rama becoming silent with the inner struggle for some time, made all think that he would stop. Their faces began to blossom with happiness. All were sighing with ease. They moved a little, turned their heads and moved their hands and legs and looked hither and tither.

" Bharata! Another point, my boy!"

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96. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 52: Workers should have respect for the king based on his character and behaviour. But Rama advises ornaments, garments, pretended serenity, appearing like lightning — as means of commanding respect from the employees! The king does not try to secure a place in the hearts of people by ruling well with justice. He tries to exhibit his luxuries, wealth, army and status; keep people in fear, threaten them with his wealth and riches and thereby try to make them servile. If all that show were not there, people would realize that the "king is also a human being like us. He does not have in his body more capacity and ability than us. The entire strength of the king is due to his money and the army." If people realized this, the king could not sit on the throne any longer. That's why, the king always tries to perform various feats to appear as a great and all-powerful person. ★

97. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 53: How will the income increase? It increases if the king raises taxes. The king always makes sure that he possesses enough money, weapons and soldiers. All these are not meant for the welfare of the people. They are meant to suppress the rebellion among people and to wage wars against other kings. A king always makes arrangements not for the sake of the people but to keep his position intact. ★

98. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 54: The king should not give extra holidays, says Rama. It means, he has to give as few as possible and make them do the drudgery always! Well, shouldn't our employees abide by Lord Rama's command? Why do they demand holidays?★

Every body felt a jerk.

"Large amounts of money should not be given to actors, belles or singers. None of their crafts is respectable.[99]

They are utterly undeserving of charity. You have to devote your time to the worship of gods, honouring Brahmins, respecting your kith and kin and have discussions with army heroes. Are you doing it?

"You have the sense of time. You know what task is to be done at the proper time. I know that. Are you fulfilling you Dharma, artha, kama (duty, money, desire) at the proper times. In the morning you have to perform sacrificial fires, worships and honor the Brahmins. The afternoon is for earning livelihood.[100]

That means, you have to go to the royal court in the afternoon and complete those tasks. During the night, you can engage in sex, my boy! Then you can spend time with women to fulfill your sexual desires. You are not monogamous like me, are you? You have many wives. You may spend time with any number of women but that has to be during the night time only. I hope you do not give up charitable deeds for the greed of money Or do you neglect earning money, caring only for Dharma? Or giving up these two, do you spend in fulfilling sexual pleasures only? My boy, you have to perform each in its proper time."

Bharata sat with his face looking irked. Unable to ask whether easing oneself out at the time of that urgency was all right or not.

"My son! Do you salute the trees at the junctions of four places?"

All people, who were with the chariots, came away, having waited and waited for a call, got bored and boldly came away. The front yard of the hut was full. Lakshmana avoided entering the hut and gladly served water in earthen pots to all those who came there.

Rama drew Bharata, who was moving afar, closer, again said, "There are fourteen kingly faults. Listen! Atheism, lying, being more angry….", he began folding his fingers.

Bharata was scratching his thigh, poked by sacrificial grass.

Sita went inside, put out the fire of firewood in the hearth, placing the mutton curry on the sill of the hearth and lay on the bed closing her eyes in the side room. Her mind was disturbed for some reason. She was feeling ashamed.

Rama continued. "Being negligent, delaying one's work, not caring for learned people who have studied all the Vedas and scriptures," Rama mentioned three more faults and failing to remember the remaining, closed his eyes and recalled quickly all the remaining in his mind. — "Yes….dullness, carnal ecstasy, thinking alone for oneself neglecting ministers, deliberating with ignoramuses, not commencing the action decided upon….not com…mence…" he said, folding Bharata's left hand little finger as his ten fingers had already been folded. "…revealing a thing thought out, fighting with all

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99. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 54: Rama said, "I hope your wealth is not going to the undeserving persons (*apatreshu*). But, all the Telugu scholars who translated this sloka have elaborated the word 'apatreshu' to include 'actors, belles, singers' and translated thus, "I hope your money is not going to actors, belles and singers' If we take this as the meaning of the word 'apaatreeshu', then it means that Rama is considering actors and singers are undeserving people. What, then, our artists, film actors who do not remove the make-up of Rama and the music scholars who beat their thighs while singing hymns on Rama, would say about it? See another praise of Rama by Valmiki at another place. In sloka 18 of sarga 1, he said, "Rama is well versed in music, sculpture and such other arts." Will a person who is well versed treat singing a base skill?

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100. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 63: since the beginning of his exile to the forest, it does not appear that this gentleman had gone in the afternoons into the forest and brought roots and fruits, fetched water from the river or washed the clothes. Why? Why does he sit chitchatting even during the time when one has to earn his livelihood?

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the enemies at a time....", he felt inconvenient unable to remember the last one for some time.

"Forcibly preaching state craft might be there in those royal duties", thought many, listening attentively. But the last one turned to be "adorning oneself in the dawn looking into the mirror."

Somebody laughed loudly and said, "What is this? He said he would mention fourteen faults but has mentioned seventy four!"

Rama is still shaking his head, "My boy! These fourteen are royal faults. The king ought not to do these things, you know!....Listen, I will also tell you about *Varga* ('fortifications'): *Panchavarga, Saptavarga, Ashtavarga, Dasavarga* and there are many more vargas. I will explain each one in detail. Listen attentively!"

Let alone attentively, Bharata had stopped listening a long time ago even inattentively. He hung his head down.

Bharata, for the first time, felt jealous of Satrughna who had stretched his legs and was sitting comfortably!

Some body was yawning and snapping his fingers.

Rama narrated all those *Vargas* as well as some crafts of how to subdue the senses.

Bharata's senses were getting out of control. He was not able to subdue his senses.

Rama told him about the differences between godliness and manhood.

He narrated some secrets of nature. He said, "so you have learnt all these attentively?" [101]

Bharata dozed with drowsy eyes, reeling, fell on Rama and at once opening his eyes, sat ashamed.

"My boy, are you fulfilling your learning by performing sacrifices in accordance with the study of the Vedas. Are you making a fruitful use of your money with grants to Brahmins and enjoying luxuries to the full? Are you making your endeavour fruitful with reading the scriptures with good things and good traditions? My boy! Have your wives become accomplished by getting progeny?" [102]

Guha got irritated. Anger, which was not there till then, gripped him. He moved near Sumantra and spoke into his ear, "What is this, pundit! It is not even a month since he came here. What is this questioning 'Have all your wives had children?' Now, they maybe far from each other, but don't the kings know each other's affairs that much? Doesn't this man know whether his brother has got children or not? If one does not know about the other's pain or pleasure, what for all this knowledge? What is this questioning? Ugh! He never finishes! Just alert him a bit! You are an elderly man!"

Sumantra surveying around said, "What alerting him? Now he is going to become king!" He whispered.

"So what?" murmured Guha in uncouth anger.

"My brother, another point...." Rama said shifting left leg on to the right one.

Bharata helplessly looked at Guha as if suggesting, "Can't you tell him?"

"Instead of looking so helpless, why don't you yourself tell him? 'You Brothers! You are equal to one another!" Guha looked at Bharata grumbling. Bharata was afraid and turned his head aside.

"My boy! Are you listening attentively? You are not entertaining atheists I think, Are you? They are highly ignorant. They prate like scholars even though they know nothing. When scriptures like the Vedas and codes exist, they reject them with wrangle. They create deficiency of righteousness among people by preaching bad things and diverting away from the righteous path. Even if atheists are Brah-

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101. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, slokas 68 to 70: Read these slokas if you want the secrets of crafts of subduing the senses and secrets of Nature. ★

102. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 72: "Have your wives become accomplished by getting progeny", asking Rama. What about his wife? ★

mins, they should never be treated with respect.[103]

Formerly Bharata had no interest in atheists, but now he thought, "This time definitely I should talk to an atheist, what may be their point of view…."

Rama could not recollect anything. Apart from that it was tiresome. Gadfly with 'zzz' noise began circling around Rama.

Guha suddenly developed a liking for the gadfly. He felt a desire to rear some gadflies this time after going home. 'Pet gadfly would be good any way', he thought. 'It is good if I take this gadfly. I can catch it if I allow it to enter the ear. Yes, I'll let it enter! Come on, Come on!'

Rama driving away the gadfly said, "So, have I told you everything?…About ministers… treasury… royal faults… harem… treasury…" He recollected everything muttering in his throat with a sound. It seemed he had spoken about all things.

He looked at Bharata as if he was saying, "So, you see! For becoming a king one should know so many things. Your mother boastfully demanded boons, has made you king, but how can you rule?"

"My boy, Bharata! By what I have told you and by my knowledge, long life, fame and Dharma (virtue), artha (wealth), kama (Sex/desire) and moksha (salvation) will come. Do you too have that knowledge?[104]

If you carefully remember and memorise every day all that I have told you and rule the country you will get not only worldly pleasures but heavenly pleasures also", he said and became silent.

Bharata again waited for "another thing" for some time.

Guha rose and went to a distance, sat under a tree and lit a cigar.

Rama was serious. When all the subjects were over, Bharata felt so happy, that he had got already heavenly pleasures by then. "Brother, sir! I am a fool. How do I know this torturous ruling ? I have come to hand over the burden of the kingdom to you", he blared, shedding happy tears.

Rama was frozen in disbelief. The whole mind experienced a turmoil in emotion. "See, it

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103. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, slokas 38 & 39: Rama is describing how stupid the atheists are and how terrible their activities are. Atheists do in fact reject scriptures. Why? Because they know that scriptures are utter unjust. To say that they divert people from the righteous path means, atheists explain to people in great detail how mean those scriptures are. They preache to people that there is no question of god in the evolution of nature, that all the values in human life have come into existence in the process of social evolution but not ordained by god; that heaven and hell do not exist and that there is no use in doing sacrifices. Owing to this kind of preaching, people think independently and attempt to come out of the shackles of scriptures, don't worship gods and don't believe the concept of rebirth. People, who reconciled with their sufferings in the name of deeds in the past birth will now realize that the rule of the king is the basis for their sufferings. As they don't accept hierarchy among people, the lower caste people do not submit to and serve the upper castes. They will realise the essence of values which dictate privileges for certain individuals and respect only for certain castes. Women will not live in ignorance whereby they voluntarily submit to men. Thus, an atheist preaching will be a blow to a rule which is based on exploitative social values. Atheists, who causes this kind of consciousness among people, will become a threat to the king and the rich class which lives happily because of the king. Hence, all scriptures grind their knives against atheism. They try to stop the spread of atheism among people. ★

104. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 100, sloka 73: Rama is asking Bharata, "Do you have as much knowledge as I have to rule the kingdom?" It is Rama's opinion that Bharata does not have such knowledge and hence he is ineligible to rule the kingdom. ★

was happened as I told you" was the expression on his looks and he searched for Lakshmana.

Lakshmana was busy serving water to people more than once, compelling them and without coming into the hut.

But when somebody approached him and said, "Your brother is looking for you", he threw down the water pitcher there itself and went running to his brother. By then, Bharata willingly said, "Brother-sir! You may have hesitated to rule the kingdom when father was alive! Our father has reached his heavenly abode grieving incessantly for you. I have performed the funeral rites and come here." He moaned again.[105]

As if struck by a thunderbolt and as if he heard terrible tidings, cruel news that were never heard, and calamity had befallen, Rama said, "Wh..hat? King Dasaratha has passed away?" and fainted on the sacred sacrificial grass seat, adjusting it, thinking that every thing must be done at the prescribed time!

Sensing that Bharata was saying something Sita came to the door, saw her husband fainting. "My lord! My lord!" she cried and went near him with fear.

"Brother sir! Brother sir!", all the brothers gathered around him.

"Rama has fallen down. Hearing the news of his father's death he has fainted", somebody said hastily reaching Guha.

Guha drowsily smoking a cigar said, "He knows everything! Will rise again himself. Don't gather round him making a fence. Let the air blow freely". He again plunged into the pleasure of the cigar.

Priests sprinkled cool water on Rama's face.

Lakshmana began fanning.

Rama wiping his face with his *dhoti*, sat weeping. Rama knew that one has to talk about the dead while weeping at their demise, "Oh! My father is no more! King Dasaratha is no more! Now, who is there to rule Ayodhya? Who is there equal to King Dasaratha? Alas! I was not present during the last period of my father. I could not perform his funeral rites with my own hands! Bharata! Alas! You were able to do. You have cleared the debt of the father who gave you birth. I could not clear the debt. Now, what is this life for? Alas! I have become a child without a father. Lakshmana, you also have become infant without father. Sita, you have become a daughter-in-law without father-in-law. Alas! Alas!" Rama shed tears in a gush. Rama mentioned only Lakshmana and Sita because Bharata and Satrughna had already finished crying at home and only three of them had to wail here! Rama did not say, "Bharata! you have become fatherless! Satrughna! You have become fatherless." He looked at only Sita and Lakshmana with tears. He knew everything.

Commencing again, Rama convulsed with moaning, "Has my father gone! Has King Dasaratha gone! With what face can I return to the kingdom without my father? No! I cannot. No, I cannot go back to Ayodhya. I cannot. Even after completing the exile in the forests, I will not go. Alas! Who will guide me as an elder?"[106]

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[105] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 101, sloka 5:** The fact that Rama was prepared for the coronation even when his father was alive is known to Bharata, isn't it? Then why should Bharata think that Rama was hesitating to take the kingdom? Bharata had got the opportunity only then to open his mouth to tell Rama about the death of their father! Rama had merely enquired about father when Bharata arrived but he had not come to know about the death of the father! Without knowing about their father he began to talk about engaging spies on ministers, the protection of harems, rearing of elephants, methods of conquering enemies, privileges for merchants, 14 royal faults, 15 *tirthas*, skills of subduing senses, secrets of Nature and so on? Knowing about their father only after giving all these sermons, that too only when Bharata himself, on his own, told him about it! Rama's devotees praise Valmiki as a great poet, don't they? Is there a sense of context in this? Should Rama not know about Dasaratha's death as soon as Bharata arrived? Poet sir, should the brothers talk about royal faults and secrets of nature before every thing? ★

He looked at Bharata and resumed saying, "My boy! Bharata! How great was our father! How virtuous! How….", he halted. "Even after completing the exile in the forest I will not return to Ayodhya' said I with a slip of tongue! What is to be done now!' He was puzzled, but decided to weep more carefully and slowly resumed, "Father used to order me to do many state affairs and deliberate with me. Who will deliberate with me when I return after completing the exile? Who will cajole me?" Again he began to convulse with grief.[107]

"Rama! Console yourself! What can anybody do? Every thing is over. Be comforted!", the priests began to console him. The more they consoled him the more he wailed uncontrollably and rolled over the sacrificial grass. In between he fainted.

With people gathering, the air circulation reduced and the back was itching with sweat, so he increased his rolling on the grass.

"*Slap on the thigh*, enough, what is that wailing" — somebody murmured from behind.

Everybody was surprised and *kept their fingers on the noses with awe*, at Rama's filial devotion to his father, except those who were murmuring.

Somebody went to Guha. "Why do you sit here being elderly instead of consoling Rama, who is bemoaning his father's demise?…How cool it is here under the tree! Oh! What a lot of fruits?…" The man who came lifted his head and began to search for means to climb the tree.

As his cigar had finished, Guha rose and started making his way through the people. People parted side ways making room for him, with great respect because of the stink of his cigar.

Guha could straight away go to Rama like a darting arrow. With a tone of reprimand, he said loudly, "What is this? You are a learned man, who knows everything. Should we tell you? Your father was old, and *how long would he sit around without leaving the world*? Are sons — all of you — not there to rule the land?…*Are you suckling*? Or *do you suck your fingers*? After you have grown old enough to rear children yourself, why do you bemoan and cry like this for father? No, no, I cannot tolerate it. Get up, see, you have to take a bath. Offer a handful of water oblation to that king. Will he be satisfied if he doesn't take water from your hands? Get up, attend to the business of bathing." He said somewhat angrily.

Rama had had half a bath with *the spray from the mouth* of Guha. Rama was groaning with grief, "Lakshmana! Get the washed dhotis and upper clothing, my boy!…Alas!…father, sir…Take the oil cake, my boy!…Alas! …father…let Sita go in the front.[108] 'While going for funeral rites women should be in the fore front', say the scriptures…Alas! Father!…Who will bring me up now…Bharata, will you also come to the river, my boy?"…he asked.

Bharata was frightened. Brother-sir might recollect some more principles of political code at the river. "We have completed all the rituals at home, brother,sir! Please return after completing them, we'll wait for you."

He saluted respectfully.

"All right, my boy!…Alas. father…" Rama

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106. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 102, sloka 11: 'I will not return to Ayodhya even after completing the exile', said Rama. 'He said it casually while he was in a sorrowful mood', say the devotees of Rama. This means truthful persons can speak any lie when they are in sorrow! They speak the truth only when they are not in sorrow, hurry, depression or restlessness and when they are very comfortable! ★

107. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 102, sloka 12: As every body may conclude that he would not really return to Ayodhya after the exile, Rama — thinking that it is better to twist his words — is cleverly revealing his intention to return to the kingdom after the exile. ★

108. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 102, sloka 21: Women should walk in the front, says Rama. Rama might not have done anything contrary to the scriptures! ★

started shivering.

"He has met me after ten years. Shouldn't he accompany me?" Rama felt very hurt.

Some employees, relatives and respected people went along with him. Those who realised that the taste of the fruits would be better than observing protocol went after the trees.

Rama took a dip in the river. Father, sir! Father, sir!" cried he trembling with the help of the chill wind and mixing the oil cake with Regu fruits, "Father, sir, so it has occasioned to offer you the oblation of oil cake! For king Dasaratha I offer an oblation of oil cake! Will there be any thing sadder than this for the world" Alas! How unfortunate it is?"...he shook his shoulders and sobbed.

One brave man, who came along with them, said provokingly, "The funeral rites were performed with all the formalities and grand arrangements with the supplies of all articles for Dasaratha in Ayodhya, my boy! You need not despair over that!" He tried to console him.

Rama felt terribly angry with that man who had made his despair seem unnecessary. He looked at him angrily. He took a handful of water and said, "Father! I, your eldest son, am offering water oblation to you! Accept this water gratification. You will not feel thirsty for one year. You will not feel hunger. Be satisfied for a year", he said and poured the water of the river into the river itself and coming on to the shore, wrapped himself in the dry clothes quickly.

Lakshmana, rinsed the dhotis, which his brother had stripped and washed and wrinkled them in the water which king Dasaratha had to drink, and put them on his shoulders.

All started back towards the hut.

Vasishta went to the chariots and returned with all the queens. The queens on coming there saw Rama's hut, the drying dhotis on the hut and whatever came in the sight of each and wailed, "Son! Rama! Are you living like this, son!"[109]

Rama saluted to all prostrating in obeisance. On the body which had dried after wetting dust stuck it like pollen on the belly, mouth and knees. All the mothers dusted the powder on the son's body, wailing. Rama embraced all the men as fathers and women as mothers, who had come to see him.

Sita saluted with folded hands all the mothers-in-law.

Rama again saluted the priests who come.

Lakshmana saluted all the mothers.

Sita saluted all the priests.

Lakshmana saluted to all the priests bowing.[110]

Salutation arrows darted for some time from this side and for some time from the other side. Dutiful mourning, wailing, abusing Kaika, salutations, blessings, amens and all were over.

All the ladies thronged in the inner room.

Rama again sat solemnly on the sacrificial grass.

On hearing the news of his father's demise he had plunged into the action of mourning on the one hand, but on the other the words of Bharata — "What do I know about ruling kingdom? I have come here to hand over the kingdom to you", reverberated *one to ten times* in his ear.

Bharata had also matted his hair, wearing a loin-cloth in the garb of a sage, had come there. He had rejected the kingdom. Now what should he do? Should he accept the kingdom? He was offering it of his own accord, wasn't he? It was his right, he could do as he pleased with the kingdom. Himself is not taking Dasaratha's kingdom. But then, if he said 'yes' would it amount to taking the kingdom given by a younger brother out of mercy? — Rama was unable to decide. The anxiety of his mind mitigated to some extent, when the thing he was longing for was taking shape. "Is accepting the kingdom good? Or is rejecting it good? Which will bring fame?" this thought began in his mind. Thinking for some time and unable to decide. "I am not able to decide either way. All right, let conversation proceed, that will decide whichever will bring a good reputation —" so he stopped the thinking temporarily.

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[109] **Ayodhya kanda, sargas 103, 104 and 112 :** Here a question arises whether Kaika too had come to see Rama along with others. But there was no mention of Kaika's presence. We find expressions like 'wives of Dasaratha', 'wives of the king', 'mothers of Rama', 'mothers-in-law of Sita'. However there is mention of Kausalya and Sumitra. ★

[110] Though Lakshmana saluted hundreds of people, but he has not asked any one thus, "How is Urmila?" If he salutes, they would say, "Live for a thousand years", but they don't say so if he asked, "how is Urmila?" ★

Rama's face was clear and transparent. There was no trace of grief.

Bharata turned aside and spoke slowly with a smile to Satrughna.

Rama shaking his head said, "My boy! Bharata!" He drew Bharata near and embraced him tightly.

Bharata was bewildered, thinking what had happened again. Rama had solemnly stopped *the scene of* his wailing, drew his brother who had finished wailing many days ago and began to enact the scene of consoling him by touching his head gently, "Don't grieve, my boy! Don't! Our father performed many pious deeds. He enjoyed many pleasures and fame here on earth. After so long, when he had become old he left the dilapidated human body and now saunters in Brahma's world with a divine body.[111]

There is no need for us to grieve", so saying he consoled Bharata stroking his back. Every body felt relieved on seeing Rama who had wailed rolling till then, begin consoling his brothers.

Rama consoled Bharata for some time and came down to the actual business directly, "My boy! What these loin cloths are? Why these matted locks without oil? What is this rejection of ruling kingdom? What is your opinion?"

Bharata, whose hands were not free to salute, because of his being in the embrace of Rama, moved back a bit, saluted and said, "Brother, sir! Our father has done this infamous action listening to the word of a woman. My mother who made my father resort to this sinful act will go to hell. I will never accept the wicked deed of my mother. I felt terribly sorry. Don't I know our family tradition, name, and fame? I thought that I should not accept the kingdom."

"Yes, my boy!", Rama caught the thread in the middle, "You are one born in a noble family. You are rich in good qualities, having performed many rituals and worships. Son of Dasaratha, how can such an excellent man like you resort to this kind of sinful act for the sake of a base kingdom?[112]

I guessed in the beginning itself that you would not accept the kingdom that is due to me! And then, tell me what happened next?" He again tried to seat Bharata in his lap.

Bharata, just moving a little bit further, "What happened, brother, sir! Wailing, blaring

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111. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 105, sloka 37: Dasaratha is in Brahma's world! In slokas 34 to 36, Rama said, "Our father is in heaven." Are heaven and Brahma's world the same? Does Rama know about it? Did Rama see what happened to Dasaratha after his death? He did not know about his father's death until others had told him, did he? Then, how does Rama know in which world his father is? His words are based on his assumption, "where will he go if not to heaven since he had done so many pious acts?" If a beggar dies, do people say, "He is strolling in heaven?" No, they don't say that. They say, "He fell into hell" since he did not do any pious act. Heaven and hell are created by those who talk about them. Nobody has seen them. Upper caste people, the rich, great devout wives go to heaven. The remaining people will definitely land in hell! He make Rama say that his father is in a particular world. As if he was a great knowledgeable person! ★

112. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 104, sloka 16: "How will a good man like you commit such a sinful act for the sake of a kingdom?" says Rama. Then, how did he commit that sinful act for the sake of the same kingdom (in order to grab the kingdom which he knew did not belong to him)? He also belongs to the same noble family, didn't he? ★

I completed the last rites of father and set out for you bringing the chief elephant. Please abandon this forest life now and start for Ayodhya at once. The tradition of our family that the eldest son ascends the throne is not unfamiliar to me. Get the coronation done at once and rule Kosala as Devendra ruled heaven. Remove the *widowhood of the earth* by taking it into your hand as husband like the night of the autumn queen shines because of the moon.[113]

You, by accepting the Kosala kingdom, give happiness to all your kith and kin. This is my prayer", said he and looked at his brother's face with humility.

Everybody became silent and looked eagerly for Rama's response.

Rama kept silent in a serious pose. 'If there is a slip of the tongue by deciding hastily on either side, it will be difficult later to retrace that. Better wait for some more time to see what will come.'

Earlier when Rama had gone to the river and returned, some people were whispering and those people had now come back to the trees and selected a good spot at a distance and had sat in a corner. Now they were talking without any fear as before.

When Rama kept silent for a long time, Bharata waited and waited and then began. "Brother, sir! You may be hesitating about ruling the kingdom forsaking the life of meditation. I am not such a competent man to presume to advise you. In the life of meditation, a detachment from mundane pleasures comes and divinity will be attained. Even by ruling a kingdom, because of the fondness of comforts and pleasures, divinity is attained. The goal of both the paths is the same. In such a case, why should you live in this arduous forest life? Had not my most cruel mother done this wicked thing..."

"My boy! It is not fair to curse one's own mother! Your mother is a very worthy woman. You should not point at her with even your little finger even!" — Rama began admonishing Bharata and every one looked at Rama admiringly.

Rama perceived quite well that people — seeing him pardoning Kaika in spite of the injustice she had done to him, and Bharata being her own son rebuking his mother and his admonishing Bharata for that — would understand how virtuous a man Rama was. It became evident that Bharata was on his side so Kaika had become powerless. There was no chance of any harm coming from her side. It is not clever on his part to play second fiddle to Bharata exhibiting his anger on her openly. If he flattered her with his humility, her anger would mitigate and people would laud his broad mindedness. Rama shook his head and said with a smile. "It was not without reason that your mother did what she has done. My boy, when our father married your mother, he promised to your grand father, 'I shall give kingdom to Kaika's son'.[114] Because of this reason, your mother insisted on his fulfilling that promise.

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113. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 104, sloka 11: 'End the widowhood of earth as her husband', said Bharata. Before crossing the Ganges, Lakshmana also said to Guha, "If Dasaratha passes away, the earth will become a widow". This means, the Kosala kingdom is first Dasaratha's wife! That is Rama's mother! She became a widow, having lost her husband. Now Rama has to take her hand as a husband and end her widowhood. How horrible and how disgusting a comparison! After Dasaratha died, it was not earth alone that became a widow. All the 353 wives became widows, didn't they? Can Rama end their widowhood also? Those who put this question will become base, wicked, atheists or all combined. Is there any sense if the scriptures — which do not accept the remarriage of a woman — describe coronation as 'ending widowhood'? Is earth wife of both father as well as son? What sort of prattle is this? Does the poet of *Ramayana* have so little sense?

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114. ***Ayodhya kanda, sarga 107, sloka 3*: The entire Valmiki *Ramayana* is based on this single sloka. Rama himself is telling Bharata. "Your mother has not unjustly done this.** ⟶

So never curse your mother, boy", Rama shook his head.

Bharata lowered his head feeling ashamed at having abused his mother.

Kausalya saw Sumitra *twisting her mouth* as if she were saying, "Why praise Kaika amidst so many people?"

Sumitra with the quality of playing second fiddle to Kausalya, "Our Rama has always been foolishly credulous, sister! What does our Rama know about diplomacy?" she wrung her hands.

"Ah! Rama is Rama! the epitome of virtue", said somebody.

Rama felt like looking at that side, but thinking that Lakshmana would anyway convey to him later about who had uttered those words, restrained his desire.

Rama did not hear whispering from another corner, "So that is the thing!" The kingdom is Bharata's right' said I, but did you believe? Look Rama has now revealed it in his own words. Don't think all that is his goodness. It is for the sake of acquiring the kingdom. Any way Bharata has agreed to hand it over to Rama, so he talks like this, but what he has said before this you know? 'I know you won't take my kingdom' he said earlier, why? What does 'my kingdom' mean? Is it 'his' kingdom?" There was whispering from another corner, which Rama did not hear.

"Brother, sir, please come at once to Ayodhya..."

"My boy! Can we violate our father's command?" Rama looked without any emotion. "What? Will he say he won't come?" The tumult of such thoughts appeared on the faces of all! The whispering people also moved forward. "Does he really not have an ambition for the kingdom?" said some one, "You are crazy, why not?" some one else struck the idea away.

Kausalya felt upset at her son's words, but felt very happy thinking that it might not look so nice for her son to accept the offer straight away and it was honorable in public for Rama to say so.

Everybody's looks were pricking Rama's back, shoulders and face.

Bharata said puzzled. "Oh! Don't say that, Brother-sir! The ministers, priests, all others and I have come after having decided that you should be the king. All distinguished citizens have come to request you. All our mothers have come. I am giving up to you your kingdom. Please receive it. Kindly show your grace to all of us and start for Ayodhya at once", he saluted. Bharata's respect for his elder brother was enhanced, the more Rama showed his unwillingness to go to Ayodhya.

"See! See! Bharata is not guilesome. He came to offer the kingdom to Rama. He requests his brother earnestly", some said aloud.

Rama saw them with straightened neck and ears. "They praise the man, who is offering the kingdom so much! How much more will they praise him who rejects it?" Rama's thoughts were not getting crystallized either way. It was not a joke giving up a kingdom. How is Bharata giving it away! Did Bharata really intend to give away the kingdom or was he saying so as it would not look nice?" I don't know how he can give it? But it will not be praiseworthy of me to accept it. Yet I have to talk carefully. Otherwise, Bharata, without understanding my opinion properly, may misunderstand that I won't take the kingdom at all. He may say, 'All right! Brother! What else can I do? I'll take leave of you'. Not allowing such a situation to occur, would it not be better to mention it in the way of the world?

Rama looked at Bharata with a smile. "My boy! I understand your prayer. I never suppose

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→ Our father promised your grand father that he would give kingdom to you only", Rama himself acknowledged the fact. Then why did Rama prepare for coronation in spite of knowing this fact? Moreover, why does he abuse Kaika? Are there qualities of a good man in Rama's words or actions? He revealed the secret now because it won't create any problem and Bharata has said he would give kingdom to Rama! Is this *Purushottama* (noblest man) our worshipping god!

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that there is any fault in a virtuous man like you, or that you have resorted to any wicked act. Elders — that is great men — always command their wives and children and that it is natural in the world. My boy! I know you are good natured. Admiring or admonishing us is father's right. He was competent to do any thing. Making me or not making me the king or marring those chances happened in accordance with his wish. You are great among knowledgeable men. Who knows what justice is? What else is there that you don't know? Sons should respect their mothers as much they respect their fathers. I can come to Ayodhya for the sake of serving my mother even" Rama reminded himself one more reason for his going to Ayodhya, which had not struck Bharata. "But is not my mother your mother? Are you not her child? You may continue worshipping her", he shook his head as though his entire mind was full of anxiety for his mother's welfare.

No body comprehended what he was saying after all. Even experts well versed in political, conspiratorial complications could not arrive at a conclusion.

The whispering people drew back a little further. "See! He does not decide either way! May be he is waiting for others to request him. Is Bharata crazy? Why does he not rule his kingdom himself!"

"Why crazy! Your mug! His clamour of reputation is his. By giving away kingdom to his brother, he is thinking that people would praise him, 'Aha! How nice is Bharata?' All are pretensions or else which is the king who will renounce his kingdom?" [115]

"Keep quiet! They are observing us!"

The atmosphere became still. The air too felt sultry and went out for cool breeze. There was perspiration on everybody's faces.

Lakshmana brought a leaf fan and bent down fanning Rama.

Vexation appeared on the faces of every body and each was accosting the other. "Oh! It is vexing? Why doesn't he decide either way."

Rama moved his leg. The marks of sacrificial grass stems struck there as an imprint on his leg. "My boy! How can both of us be justified in violating our father's command. We have to abide by the commands of that pious man. He gave you the kingdom. You enjoy it! He gave me fourteen years of exile in the forest. I'll enjoy it! Let us take whatever share he has assigned to us. I will live in these dreadful forests and enjoy this life….Fourteen years….fourteen years…." He bowed his head and rubbed his leg gently.

In an utter silent atmosphere, boredom and disappointment spread. Yet various doubts cropped up.

What new thing had he said? 'I will live in the forest! Fathers' command! Fourteen years!'….. Thereafter! Will the kingdom be his? Is he going to give the kingdom to Bharata for fourteen years only? Had Bharata's mother asked like this? Did king Dasaratha tell Rama what should happen after fourteen years? — Every body had some doubt or the other!

It was as if a pebble had been flung into the still waters.

Everybody's mind was full with waves of thoughts!

Priests, ministers and all others looked at each other's face. Did Dasaratha tell Rama that Rama should give the kingdom to Bharata for 14 years and thereafter Rama should rule it? — They were speaking with their eyes in bewilderment.

Guha could not restrain himself and looked around searching for somebody to ask the question.

He saw Sumantra who was looking hither and tither like himself. Sumantra, who moved away from Guha, unable to bear the stink of cigars from Guha, moved nearer to him.

" Pundit! Will the kingdom go to Rama after 14 years? Do you know anything about it?" asked Guha in a low tone.

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115. Bharata gave up the kingdom for the sake of fame. As we proceed in the story, we will find a scene when Bharata himself expresses the same.

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Sumantra, who was eagerly waiting for a chance to tell somebody, puffed his eyes, lowered his tone and said, "No, man! I was present near him from the beginning. It was all Kaika's roaring, but for the king, he did not even open his mouth? Of course, at the time of this man's departure to the forest he howled. He did not mention the issue of the kingdom or years! Some thing would have taken place without my knowledge…!Ugh! Throw away that pack of cigars taking out from the navel! You are *killing us*!"

"Stop it, Pundit! Why this fuss about cigars!…In fact, nothing might have taken place. This man can fabricate things! I thought of Rama differently, but he seem a very clever chap!"

Jabali looked at Vasishta with a side glance as if asking, "What will happen after 14 years?"

Laughing ironically, Lakshmana's inner voice asked Lakshmana, "At least do you know any thing about the kingdom? Kaika had point blank disallowed taking even a few grains and coppers and that old man had kept silent. When did he ask this son to take this kingdom after the exile? *Hi…Hi…Hi…*your brother is dreaming well!" Lakshmana clenched his teeth against his inner voice and in that anger hit Rama with the fan.

Slowly picking up courage, Sita asked Kausalya obediently in a low voice, "Mother-in-law! He mentions something about a share. What is it?" "May be, Baby! How do we know?" Kausalya kept silent, since there were the rival wives around.

Though he was confused for some time, finally Bharata also said wondering, "Brother sir! Why mention the issue of 14 years, when you have to receive the entire kingdom from this moment? If you become king, father in heaven will be pleased. Don't be tardy. Accompanied by sister-in-law on the royal elephant…."

"My boy!" Rama saw with dejection. "When Destiny is driving us, is there any possibility for us to do as we like? However much one accumulate riches, they are bound to face ruin at the end! People who reach the pinnacle once should fall to an abysmal position later. All these bonds with wives, offspring and relatives will inevitably cause detachment! None of these bonds is permanent. Have to get separated as two sticks that get together and separate in the sea. Every creature born has to come to an end. People never grieve that every minute their life span is drying up. They clamour of carnal pleasures day and night. They never give a thought to the other worlds. So, whatever deed a man performs, the decision should not be taken without thinking about what brings fame and what bestows heaven on one," Rama sighed.

Guha's mind wanted a cigar even after listening about the pleasures of the other worlds. He felt that desire since the time Sumantra had reminded him of his cigar. He slowly rose up and making way among people, went and sat under the *Neereedu* tree.

Many people were dozing there having spread their head cloth on the grass.

Some people were eating all available fruits and talking about their household affairs.

"What? Is he saying he will come?" somebody asked Guha.

"Don't know! Not decided yet! My mouth got numb, so I have come away"

"All right! Let us go back there and sit, it is long since we came away", so saying some of them started toward the hut.

Bharata was narrating some principles of code to his elder brother. Anyway, Rama observed that Bharata was a scholar and a wise man. So, he was showing his knowledge to the people. "Brother, since you are an omniscient, old people also worship you. You ask the elders questions, just only to respect them, but you know all. You have no hatred for the living as you do not have hatred towards the dead. You don't have any desire for anything that is present as you don't have any desire for any thing that is absent. You don't wail over hardships. You don't exult over pleasures. Such an enlightened person as you, should not suffer the hardships of this forest life. It seems your anger against me has not yet gone. Actually I thought of killing my mother for the injustice done to you, but restrained myself for fear of *Dharma*. I am hesitating here to condemn my own father in the presence of so many people, otherwise will any man versed in Dharma do such a heinous act for the sake of the word of a woman? Elders say ruinous thoughts sprout at ruinous times. King Dasaratha proved that true. My father might have done injustice, but being the son of Dasaratha how can I resort to injustice? Is it not the duty of sons to set right injustice, even if father has done it? Since you are a virtuous man, you should set right the wrong deed of our father. Showing grace on the Kosala people, start at once Brother!"

The whispering people were biting their ears, "What is all this? It seems these brothers do not know what they are talking about. Now they abuse their father, in the next moment they say 'we are a virtuous man's sons!' He says Rama does not grieve over hardships. Again he says Rama should not have the hardships of forest life. Ugh! Tiresome! Just a few moments ago he said that Rama would never be angry, now Bharata says 'it seems your anger against me is not gone!' Why here? Let us go there. Berry trees are laden with so many berries!"

"No, let us listen to what he says. Shall we see the sons of the king again and again? Once they return to Ayodhya they will be on their own and we shall be in our own", said the other fellow and kept silent.

People talked aloud among themselves.

Everybody was lauding Bharata. "Yes! It is fitting that Rama starts for Ayodhya. What Bharata says is just. Bharata knows everything!"

Rama had not at all liked Bharata preaching him Dharma. But, he had himself praised Bharata many a time before, "You are a knowledgeable man and a scholar", so he had to contain his unwillingness to some extent. But what was this abusing of father in the presence of so many people? That too in his presence! Even though he liked Bharata abusing their father, would it look nice before people to maintain a silence against it! Moreover, people would realise who was virtuous if one son exhibited filial devotion while the other abused him. If he yielded to the arguments of Bharata, wouldn't all people think that "Some how Bharata brought his elder brother back convincing him and Rama could not reply to the questions Bharata put." People will praise the tact, wisdom and sacrifice of Bharata. He should not yield at all. In fact, rejecting the offer appeared to him more laudable than accepting it.

When every body was looking at him, Rama shook his head and looked at Bharata with a smile, "My boy! Our father was a pious man, having performed many sacrifices and donated charities. It is not fair for the sons to find fault with him. It is not fair for women to find fault with their husbands. Even though our father did something wrong, can I abuse him like you, since I followed our father's command? I'll never disobey our father's order. I'll not return to Ayodhya until the exile is over. You go to Ayodhya and get crowned and go on ruling well. I will spend time with the hardships of the forest life. I don't wish for anything more than to obey father's command. We have to observe the duties that bestow pleasures of the other worlds, but what is the use of these riches?" He sat looking some where, turning his face up, as though there was no need to talk any further.

When the issue was clinched, there was tumult among the people.

"Oh! What a virtuous man! I expected it so in the beginning that Rama would not disobey the order of his father."

"Rama is Rama anyway!"

"If Rama also violates his duty, will the worlds survive?"

The whispering people came closer to each other. "What? Do you say he will not come, really?"

"Cannot say. We cannot trust yet. He can shift his stand either way"

"Well said!"

"Hush! Don't talk loud in the dirty hoarse voice of yours"

"Somebody ran to Guha and said, "Rama says he will not come!" He felt exultation with the feeling that he was the first to convey news.

Guha unwilling to remove the cigar in the mouth, remained as before shaking his head.

Kausalya, dumb struck, leant against the wall and sat like one, out of sense. When she thought that he was casually talking like that, what was this clinching! He had rejected the kingdom then, it was all right. But why should he reject now also? Father's command? *Fiddlesticks*! He alone had the filial duty which none else had! Kausalya is unable to understand the attitude of her son.

Since Rama had started for the forests, all the hopes of Kausalya had been on Bharata — that he would not accept the kingdom! The same thing has happened as she expected. The pious man is ready to give up the kingdom. Now, while getting off the chariots a few moments ago, she said to Sumitra smilingly, "You may be feeling that your son lives doing service to my son. Bharata is going to give back the kingdom. When Rama becomes the king, will not your son also enjoy all the royal pleasures."[116]

Having come from such a distance, with so many hopes, now Rama rejects the kingdom! — Kausalya held back her tears with an effort. She was not bold enough to face Sumitra. She felt eager to call Bharata in and tell him, "Some how or other convince your brother." But Bharata anyway is persuading him.

Sita was depressed not knowing the reason for her mother-in-law's anxiety..

Bharata's awe and respect for his brother multiplied when he clinched the issue by rejecting the offer to return to Ayodhya. He became more anxious to take back with him such a good natured man! He asked the people sitting around to move aside, prostrated at the feet of his brother saluting and touching the feet with his head, again sat and saluted. "Brother! You are competent to rule all the worlds. Who else can rule the Kosala kingdom except you? Am I aware of the political codes and worldly customs as you are! When you, the eldest is present, is it proper for me to rule? I am like a donkey. Can a donkey and horse be the same? Can an eagle and Garuda be the same? I am an ignoramus. A fool inferior to you. How can I rule the kingdom?[117]

Is not the duty of ruling a kingdom — fulfilling the debts of gods, Brahmins and ancestors, conquering enemies, giving pleasure to friends, protecting Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra castes without violation of their caste duties — greater than the duty of meditation? For that matter who knows what benefit accrues from meditation? Whether it accrues or not is doubtful. Is it not difficult to establish that will be such and such a benefit? The benefit that may come later on has no valid proof. So, please bid goodbye to this meditative life, and bestowing grace on us, start and come to Ayodhya. Please rule us — orphans without a king", Bharata looked hopefully at Rama.[118]

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116. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 103, sloka 7: Kausalya is making Sumitra feel happy that Lakshmana will also enjoy royal pleasures after Rama becomes king. "Don't worry that your son is doing drudgery", says Kausalya.

117. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 105, sloka 6 and sarga 106, sloka 24: Bharata is describing himself as donkey, an ordinary bird and stupid. But if we can read the mind of a donkey, it will have self -respect. Whereas Bharata does not have it. The poet, in order to sit Rama in a palanquin and glorify him, makes every other character seems inferior. Every other character admits, 'I am the more inferior creature compared to Rama'. Will Rama's greatness decrease if Bharata were also capable? Rama may become a great valorous person if all others are scoundrels! *Just as a castor oil plant is like a huge tree when there is no other tree present!*

118. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 106, sloka 20: To convince Rama, Bharata is speaking of 'atheism'. 'Who knows what benefit or no benefit accrues from meditation?' says Bharata! They twist their arguments in whatever way they want. Those who meditate also think that 'nothing will result from meditation'. There isn't anybody who has observed its result. They simply believe what their elders said, 'you get piety, you get heaven if you meditate'. Even those elders do not know any thing. If abandoning comforts is such a piety, how much piety should millions of poor — who do not have desire for comforts — get?

"True, it is correct what Bharata said. What comes of this meditation? Dust. If it is not madness..." somebody was saying boldly from the corner, without being seen.

Rama got very angry at Bharata. "Is he great as to doubt the duty of meditation?" He became furious of Bharata's disobedience. But, nothing came to his mind to answer properly. He had not seen any valid proof to show that so and so got such and such benefit from meditation and thus shut his mouth. People who meditated also died. No sage is able to say what they become. They only said that all those who followed the Vedic *Dharma* reached heaven, but there is no one who has seen it. No body knows the truth or falsehood of it. Rama became furious as he did not find an answer quickly. But he was so wise to realise that it was not wise to enter that discussion. Turning serious, he said, "Bharata! Let that question be whether any benefit accrues from meditation or not. I am committed to truth! I won't go back on my word. I don't come to Ayodhya at all violating father's word." He lifted his head, sat looking at the ceiling, in a pose of "do whatever you like."

Bharata was puzzled. Not having the courage to talk anything further with such a brother in a serious pose, he looked around.

"Rama will not go back on his word!"

"What self-possession! What self-possession!"

"After all this, why hasn't he said anything about the benefit of meditation?"

"Should it be specially mentioned? Piety."

"If it were anybody else, would they not snatch the chance of kingdom?"

"If it were you, you would take it first"

"Why? wouldn't you have taken it?..." A tiny tiff erupted in a corner.

"Rama had really refused to come! Why are you sitting here? Damn your cigar! " some body came gasping and admonished Guha. Guha's cigar was any way burnt out.

Guha threw away the burnt out cigar and asked, "Is he Really refusing to come?" He looked with some surprise.

"Not at all!"

"He appeared to yield if he were entreated more!"

"We had thought so earlier, but don't know the reason, he is obstinate."

"Let us go and see," Guha rose.

People parted side ways and left the royal path free for Guha. Guha straight away went and sat before Rama.

By then, Jabali was preaching Rama some thing.[119]

"My boy, you yourself said that the bonds of wife and offspring are transitory. If a father's bonds to offspring an ephemeral so is the bond of children to father. When each floats his way in the current of life, one performing rituals, worships for another is a waste, is it not so clear? Rama, there are no other worlds. There is only one world. All these meditations are futile. A man doing meditation forsaking earthly comforts will lose both opportunities. There is no binding on you to follow Dasaratha's order. He was a king, you are a king. It is utter delusion that your father is in the other world. Your father has become the same that dead objects become. That is the nature of living creatures. All these funeral ceremonies, oblations to the deceased ancestors are utter waste. If the food and water offered here reach the other world, the food offered in our house should also reach people on a visit to other villages. But it does not happen. All these codes are fabricated by some out of selfish motives. So my boy! Bharata offers you the kingdom. He entreats you so deeply to rule. Take it with out hesitation. Enjoy the pleasures of becoming a king," Jabali said with a smile.

There rose a commotion among people. Everybody was plunged into an unbearable wonder and tension.

Some performers of daily worship got angry.

The whispering people waited for Rama's reply without batting their eyelids.

Rama was distressed by various thoughts. "What is this atheistic stink!" All his limbs shrank. His mind was calmly struggling, "Jabali is a Brahmin. Scholar. His argument is a bit reasonable. He has never said any of these words even once in Ayodhya!"

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[119] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 108:** Jabali is preaching 'rationalism' to Rama. ★

Everybody was focussing attention on him. If he yielded to Jabali's logic and accepted the kingdom, only atheism would rule in the land. He should not show any interest in these words. He should speak back harshly.

Looking at Jabali seriously Rama said, ""You are our priest, so I should respect you. But I am not able to bear this atheistic logic. I have heard many times that atheists tell lies. You are also telling me those lies. Devendra got the over lordship of heaven because he performed a hundred sacrifices. Sages have reached heaven because they performed meditation. How do we know that? Atheists may ask. They have written in the Vedas.[120]

We see the sages becoming stars and shining in the heaven. What more proof do you want? So the Vedic dharmas are true. Heaven and hell are true. Gods and sages have said, "Truth is the ultimate Dharma." If some rule kingdoms on this earth, some will become their servants and serve. If some go to heaven, some go to hell. These differences come from truth and untruth.[121]

If I forsake this truth, the people in the kingdom will go astray. Please wind up these atheistic words. As a matter of fact, a scholar should not stand before an atheist." Rama turned his head aside in anger. As he was unable to contain anger, Rama continued. "Buddha is like a thief. There is no difference between Buddha an an atheist.[122]

How could you — who has anti-Vedic sense, who is a hardcore atheist at heart, and propagating atheism leave the path of Dharma and tread on the path of 'Adharma' disguised in the Vedic garb — enter the court of king Dasaratha? By taking you in, my father also becomes a great sinner", said Rama. Forgetting that he had turned his face aside, he looked at Jabali angrily and his eyes turned red.

Jabali was terribly afraid on seeing Rama become so angry. "If you do not want the kingdom, what do I lose any way? Why should I get it my neck foolishly", he thought bowing his head. Rama was convinced that he was an atheist. If his (Rama's) view had not changed it would be risky for his life. Bharata said in many ways, that atheists should not be ignored. If exile or a death sentence was given as punishment, in this old age...lived so greatly all the while...now loaf about in the lands...why such a hard fate for him? What loss is there for him whoever rules?

Looking at Rama modestly, Jabali said, "My boy! Rama! I spoke like that to take you to Ayodhya some how or other, but I am not an atheist. Even if anybody talks of atheism, I can not tolerate it. I condemn it strongly. It is not at all my view that there are no other worlds! Unable to return to Ayodhya without you, I thought it enough to achieve the goal some how…I spoke like that."

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[120] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 109, sloka 29:** Rama is saying what has happened due to meditation and sacrifices. He is insisting on believing them since they have written in the Vedas. Without answering Jabali's questions, Rama is resorting to skipping and threatening. ★

[121] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 109, sloka 16:** 'Kings who rule the world become rulers merely because they speak the truth', thus spake Rama! It follows that the rich are the ones who speak the truth. The poor tell lies and hence in such a sorry plight! It also means, the reason for the existence of Masters and Servants is also the speaking of truth and untruth! ★

[122] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 109, sloka 34:** Rama is accusing Buddha. According to the ages of '*Ramayana*' and 'Buddha', Rama belongs to a much older period than Buddha. How, then, did Rama know about Buddha? How could Rama mention Buddha's name?

It is strange to note Rama talking about Buddha. The fact that 'poets subsequent to Valmiki have added many things to the original' is proved by such incidents as these. Aversion to sacrifices and meditation might have begun among people owing to the influence of Buddhism. We have to assume that people might show interest in rationalism. The poets who defend the Vedic values, in order to attack atheism and to abuse Buddha through the character of Rama, must have added this reference to Buddha. ★

He tried to convince Rama.[123]

Rama's anger did not abate. He remained

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[123] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 109, slokas 38 & 39: Jabali's** atheism flew away within five minutes for fear of the sword. In this scene, the poet inserts some atheism and dismisses it through the character of Jabali as: 'whatever I said is false. I am not at all an atheist, more over I hate atheistic logic vehemently. I know pretty well that there are other worlds'. This is an attempt to prevent the dissemination of atheism among people. It is the poet's expectation that people will reject atheism if he makes the same character — who talked of atheism — say, 'atheism is not worth practising'. But what happened in this scene is not that Jabali lost his case by means of 'logic'. If Rama had put some great question and Jabali, unable to answer, put a blank face, then we can conclude that he has lost his case. But Rama had not given clear-cut answers to any of Jabali's questions. Whatever scriptures Jabali had dismissed, Rama had showed the same scriptures as standard. Whatever values (dharmas) Jabali had dismissed as futile, Rama had furiously insisted on their practice. Does this mean defeating atheism by means of logic? To Jabali's question, "Will the balls of rice that you offer reach the dead", Rama should answer directly. Instead, if he said, "What is this defiance of scriptures? They wrote this way in the Vedas. That's all. Shut up!", will this be an answer to that question? Here it is not atheism that is defeated. If the atheist shuts his mouth due to fear of death, will this amount to defeating him?

But, this scene outwardly gives an impression to ordinary people that there occurred a debate between Jabali and Rama; that Jabali lost his case and admitted that 'atheism was wrong'; that Vedic values are worth following and that there is no truth beyond what Rama said. If Rama did not have the authority to tell Bharata to punish Jabali, Jabali would have won the case in this debate and Rama would have shut his mouth and kept quiet.

As the conditions in society change, the capacity to think among people increases due to many experiences. They incline toward rationalism. The ruling class does not like this trend because it will benefit if people hold superstitious beliefs. Hence, newer and newer scenes attacking rationalists creep into the old religious texts. Or, the priests, scholars and such like who preach the religious texts keep opposing new knowledge during their sermonizing to people.

Subsequent to the emergence of Buddhism and after it attracted people, some sargas had newly appeared in Valmiki's *Ramayana* in order to prevent the 'disease of atheism'. Likewise, now, there is a need for some more sargas to intrude in order to prevent the 'disease of socialism'. This time, there will be a heated discussion between Rama and a 'revolutionary pundit' on the question of class distinctions, class consciousness, and Russia-China differences. Don't say that Marx was not present during Rama's time! Buddha was also not there during Rama's time, for that matter! It is not necessary. Rama can say anything. If a discussion on Socialism is held, Rama would say, "What is this stink of classes? Vedas did not say anything about this? Marx is a thief. How did king Dasaratha believe and appoint you — who is propagating the teachings of Marx like a revolutionary in his court? I will no longer tolerate this terrible thing." Then he would look at Bharata with a warning, "This man is a class enemy. Send him away quickly from this world." The poet will write that our revolutionary pundit got frightened and changed his views. Our scholar would really be frightened since he has been addicted to the luxuries of the royal court. "My boy Rama! I talked so, to make you come back to the kingdom. I too do not have any belief in class struggle. I have a lot of hatred for those who talk of class consciousness. The Vedic values alone are undoubtedly worth practising. *Karma* (deeds in the previous birth) alone regulates human beings. The other worlds alone is truth…..", our scholar will become a revisionist and save his life. Therefore, all our bourgeois poets have the responsibility to interpolate such a scene as soon as possible in order to divert people from socialism.

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silent and tight-lipped. Tremor began in Jabali. Fearing that Rama, at any moment, might suddenly turn his face and say, "Bharata! Punish Jabali at once with the death sentence! Wipe out atheists in the land!" the limbs of Jabali began to shiver. With alarm, he looked at Vasishta and prayed with his eyes, "What is this predicament? I shall never take my life in my hands in future. Kindly convince Rama."

Vasishta instilling confidence in Jabali with his eyes, turned towards Rama and said calmly with a smile, "My boy! Rama! Jabali spoke like that because of the love he has for you, he is not at all an atheist! He knows all the Vedic dharmas. He knows that human beings reach other worlds by their virtues and sins. My boy, Jabali, is unable to live without you and unable to see you facing ordeals in the forest and because he wants to take you back to Ayodhya, he spoke like that, you know!"[124]

Rama's anger had decreased by then. Everybody accepts that there are other worlds. Atheism was defeated. His truthfulness was real. His forest life would not go waste. He would get heaven for sure.

"Yes! If there were no heaven and hell how bad it would be!" somebody declared. A merchant, waving about his hand with diamond rings on five fingers said to another gentleman beside him, "The other day my neighbour plucked two *nimma* (lemons) from our yard. If not hell, will he get heaven?" said he.

"If one gets hell for your *nimma*, what about those who have plucked our *daanimma* (Pomegranate)?..."

"Should we say separately? *Raurava* hell, the worst of hells"

"Yes! Yes!" the man beside him felt glad.

Vasishta wasn't sure of Rama's anger on Jabali had totally receded. He thought that Rama's attitude wouldn't change unless he told him a little about the gods.

Vasishta turned to Rama with a smile. "My boy! I'll tell you how the worlds originated. Listen to all that process", he commenced *shaking his head.*

"Oh, god! Now we have to hear about the creation of the worlds!" somebody cried with fear. But that cry was not heard in that howl.

Vasishta began his narration.

"At the beginning there was water all over."

"How did water come into existence? Who created water?" asked Vasishta's inner voice. He looked around, as if somebody had asked the question. All were silent. Rama listened to him attentively. Vasishta realized that it was his own voice. But he pushed it aside and proceeded further.

"From that water, the earth was born. Next, Brahma and the gods were born by themselves. None created them," he said quickly as if he was answering somebody.[125]

"What is Brahma"— Rama was about to ask, but stopped suddenly. Well, how bad it would sound if he asked! Wouldn't the people think that Rama did not know any thing about Brahma all these years! Better to pose as if he knew about it. He moved still closer to show his attentiveness.

For the words of Vasishta every body was approvingly lifting their heads, "Bravo, Amazing..." The merchant lifted his hands full of rings!

When a man of the whispering duo was snoozing, the second man *twisted* his ear and woke him up. "Vasishta is saying something. Listen to him."

"I am sleepy"

"When again will we learn about such things?"

"When again such good sleep..."

"Hush! I won't allow."

Opening his eyes with compulsion, "So far what has he said?"

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[124] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 110, slokas 1 & 2:** Vasishta is convincing Rama that Jabali is innocent and not an atheist.

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[125] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 110, sloka 3:** According to Vasishta, god (Brahma) was born when water and earth were ready! Will the god not feel angry with Vasishta since he put him at the end!

★

"Don't know, something he said…Some Brahma…"

"For damn Brahma have you spoiled my sleep?" — irritably, he saw towards Vasishta.

Vasishta was shutting and opening his eyes. The inner voice was still saying something.

"You failed to tell them who created water, all right. What is Brahma, who created it, that you have to explain, if you cannot I won't tolerate it, " Vasishta's inner voice demanded.

Afraid of that voice, Vasishta, stroked his beard, said calmly, "I am only telling you the things I have read in the Vedas, my boy!"

"Tell me, sir!" Rama moved a bit closer assuming that the words of Vasishta were for him.

"Brahma was self born, then…."

Marichi was born to Brahma.

For Marichi, Kasyap.

For Kasyapa, Surya.

For Surya…...............

The ears of the whispering people turned red like the Coral flowers.

"What? Without wives?"

"Wives will be there. But they don't mention the wives"

"Why? They are the ones who give birth, aren't they?"

"Keep quiet. Listen to what he is saying."

Vasishta was recounting many names..

"…............son Bhagiratha"

Bhagiratha's son was Kakutsa.

That is why, my boy, you have become Kakutsas.

Kakutsa's son was Raghu.

So you are known as Raghavas, my boy.

………..My boy!

………..….My boy!

…..son Nabhaga.

Nabhaga's eldest son was Aja.

Aja's eldest son was Dasaratha.

Dasaratha's eldest son is Sri Rama.

This is the order of the world….my boy" he concluded.

Every body looked at each other's face. "Does the world mean only Rama's dynasty? Are we not part of the world?" Their eyes spoke with each other quickly.

The whispering people got very angry.

Vasishta looked at Rama and said, "My boy! You have seen the order of the creation of the world. The eldest sons alone become eligible to rule the kingdom. So you deserve the kingdom. You have to rule Kosala!" he concluded.

Rama became furious. What did this gentleman do in Ayodhya? Why didn't he chant all this blank verse in the ears of Dasaratha and convince him? Why did he remain unconcerned. Tut, these Brahmins go to any extent", his inner soul shouted, not able to contain anger. Rama kept silent without commenting anything to the inner soul. The shouts of his inner soul pleased him. His determination grew stronger. 'In spite of being court priests and instead of saying what was needed at the proper time — why did all these scholars keep quiet indifferently? Who would go if they invited at their will and pleasure? No, come what may I should not go. That's all! That's all!'

Observing Rama's silence Vasishta thought that he was inclined to agree, he said with a smile "My boy! There is nothing wrong in following what the preceptors and priests say. Your mother also wants you to come back to Ayodhya. The world will understand that you returned to Ayodhya obeying your mother's order. It will not be your fault." He kept silent.

Some sages inhabiting Chitrakuta said to Vasishta obediently, "Sage Vasishta! Rama has come to those forests bound by truth. It is not fair on your part to pressurise him so much. He has to execute the task of killing Ravana. That Rakshasa king is crossing the limits day by day. Arrangements to kill him should be begun. Rama has to continue this exile at least for this mission.[126] Apart from that, My boy, Bharata! If you want your father to be happy, in heaven, you should end your efforts to invite Rama to

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[126] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 112, sloka 4:** All the sages are very particular that Rama must kill Ravana. Plans with regard to killing Ravana had been going on much before and even without reference to the incident of Surpanakha. This is the actual plan! ★

Ayodhya. If the boons given to Kaika are nullified Dasaratha can not be at peace in heaven, you know!" They cautioned.

Everybody was silent.

Rama thought deeply. "Definitely my reputation will die, if I go to Ayodhya now, after so much restraint. Here….not having an iota of difficulty with Lakshmana's service…Sita's obedience…Every thing is all right. Moreover, with the deliberations made with the sages means of killing Ravana are known. By violating father's command, it is inevitable to move far from truthful worlds. It will happen not just in my father's but in my case too. The forest life seems to be the best by all means. After all, how long is fourteen years?"

Rama's heart felt somewhat relieved. Saluting Vasishta, Rama said, "Sage! Pardon me! I cannot violate my father's command. I can not come to Ayodhya abandoning this forest life. Let the worlds go topsy-turvy, let oceans dry up, let air be stand still, let light leave moon, I am not a son who will disobey my father's command", he stated clearly and remained silent.

Everybody heaved a sigh of relief.

Every body began talking aloud, praising Rama.

"We have known Rama from the beginning"

"Where can one find a son like Rama in this world?"

"There will not be such a one even in future"

"Did my son ever listen to my word?"

"Between us, tell me have you ever obeyed your father?"

"Why *sinful words*, I have not obeyed him"

"Then what more is there left to say? Such is your family tradition!"

Guha felt remorse for not having understood Rama properly till then. "You are a worthy son of that father!" He had tears in his eyes.

All sages in one voice praised Rama and Bharata. "Ah! Both are duty bound. Both are truthful. Dasaratha has two excellent sons." [127] They looked at them with beaming faces.

Lakshmana felt slighted. Satrughna bowed his head, unable to see Lakshmana's face.

Rama felt very satisfied. Would he get so much fame if he had gone back to kingdom? Would his paternal obedience have got so much publicity? If he went, he too would have been on a par with the other kings in the world. Kaikeyi had done him good. That is why his greatness was becoming so popular in the world.

That night [128] passed with every body praising Rama.

Kausalya sat in the darkness and wept continuously.

★ ★ ★

The following day all got ready for the return journey. They harnessed the chariots. Saddled the horses.

They arranged a Howdah on the chief elephant. Kausalya unable to part from Rama wept embracing him. All the women could not contain their sorrow and cried loudly.

Guha embraced Rama and sorrowfully que-

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127. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 112, sloka 3: All the sages said that Dasaratha had attained 'piety' by giving birth to Rama and Bharata. Thus they praised only Rama and Bharata because they are 'would be' kings. There was no one who looked at the faces of Lakshmana and Satrughna. ★

128. It would have been appropriate if Rama had given all those royal sermons which he began as soon as Bharata had stepped into the hut — during the night or the next day, wouldn't it have? When he first met Bharata, he should have enquired about his father. He should have talked about the kingdom after wailing, bathing and offering food to the dead father. He should have finished telling Bharata that he wouldn't come to Ayodhya. Then he should have given all those royal sermons for the safety of Bharata since it was Bharata who had to rule the kingdom. Had he said it in this order, it would have been appropriate in the context. Rama caught hold of Bharata cleverly — thinking that Bharata would perhaps go to sleep! Poor felow, Bharata! ★

ried, "My boy, when shall I see you again?"

Bharata drew a pair of new sandals wrapped in silk cloth and placed them before Rama. The fresh leather was shining brightly with its black colour. Though the leather was cured, on taking them out, the smell was strong. Their belts were shining with stars made of gold leafs. The sandals shone brightly with designs and with oil on the straps.

Bharata saluted Rama. "Brother, sir! Place your feet on these sandals. They will rule the Kosala Empire. They will look after the welfare of the people. Justice will stand firmly because of them. I'll place them on the throne and stand nominally as their representative. Kindly grace me", he bent before him in humility.[129]

Rama looked solemnly. Would his sandals ascend the throne of the Kosala kingdom? Will Bharata rule as his representative only?...Very good! Now he would not need to worry about the kingdom at all. It will always be mine!

People thronged to see what Rama would do. People at a distance were pushing forward asking, "What? What?"

"Rama...sandals", people in the front were uttering incoherent words to the people at a distance. Each was moving forward to see for himself.[130]

Rama smilingly stood up and placed his feet in the sandals and removed them.

Bharata put the sandals to his eyes as a mark of respect. He held them high lifting them up for all to see. Ministers, officers and people in the front waved their hands towards the sandals, as though they were *receiving camphor fire* respectfully, as blessing. People at the back went aside slowly.

"What will they do with those shoes," somebody asked with *Neereedu* fruit colour smeared on their mouths.

"They say they will place them on the throne. They say they will rule"

"Wh...hat! Wh...om?"

"Us. Who else?"

"Enough! I better leave the country, instead of living there shamelessly when shoes rule"

"Don't call them shoes. Call them *Padukas* (holy sandals)"

"What? If they are mentioned in Sanskrit do they cease to be shoes?"

"Even if they are *Padukas* will any body hang them from their neck instead of wearing them on the feet? Tell me if you will not go away? We'll go to Guha's kingdom"

"I won't. You too won't go. Home and hearth, cattle and chattel — where can we go leaving them all! What if Rama sits on the throne or his shoes sit there, or they place a boulder on it? All is the same. Nothing will come to us."

"Well said. It is also true. By the by where will Bharata sit?"

"I don't know. Let us see"

At another place the people whispering were discussing. "How, in fact, did Rama agree to give up his shoes? He said father's command, father's command. What does it mean? What is the difference if he ascends the throne or places his article on it keeping it under his control? Are both not the same? He should not in fact give his shoes to Bharata."

"Does it mean he has kept the kingdom under his control?"

"What is that? Does his consent not mean keeping it under his control? Should he not bluntly tell his brother 'you are the king. You have to rule. I won't accept anything of mine to rule the kingdom'?"

"Then, come on, you may ask Rama...."

The emotional man retraced and scratched his head. If he asks Rama that his head won't remain in its place, will it?

Bharata placed the sandals on a golden platter, sprinkled flowers on them, placed it on

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129. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 112, slokas 21 & 24: Bharata is saying how these sandals protect the people. ★

130. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 112, sloka 22: Rama, without any opposition to putting his sandals on the throne, put his feet in the sandals and removed them. ★

his head and stood in front of his brother.

"Did he know before hand that Rama would not come? Why had he brought these platter and all?"

"Ugh! Keep quiet! He may have brought it to wash feet"

"Then, why did they bring those shoes?"

"They might have brought them thinking that Rama would use them!"

"Then, should they not leave them with Rama?"

Guha did not like Bharata carrying the shoes and all that. What is the matter with these brothers, it has been crazy from the beginning for him. Did the Raghu dynasty suffer some madness?

Rama looked at Bharata seriously. "My boy Bharata! You have to forget this sinful act of your mother, which she might have done, with selfishness or over ambition or falling prey to wicked thought!" he said, and looked as though asking him, "Will you really be able to forget it?" [131]

"My boy! You are a clever man. You are competent to rule all the worlds. You have to rule carefully. Go back to Ayodhya and live happily. Don't find any fault with your mother, I swear on you! With pleasures..... comfortably ...... live!"

With the sandal platter on the head and circumambulating round Rama, Bharata said, "Brother, sir! I do not want the pleasures, which you don't have. Till you return I will live the life of meditation eating herbs and roots, wearing a loin cloth. I will not stay in Ayodhya enjoying pleasures. I will live in a remote village. I shall hand over the entire kingdom to these holy sandals", so saying he was about to bow his head, but restrained lest the platter fall down.

Rama with a serious smile said, "Well my boy! You will be blessed. Your fraternal devotion is great. There is no brother in all the worlds to out do you. You will get fame for the Raghu dynasty *(by carrying shoes!)*. Ruling a kingdom is very difficult, you know! Rule the kingdom carefully with the assistance of the ministers and priests. None should have it in his mind that your mother has done such a wicked thing owing to her selfishness", lowering his tone, "Be careful with the kingdom! Just keep a watch on the ministers. Appoint three spies on each. Every time treasuries, mints, army......."

Jerking with fear Bharata said, "Yes sir, yes sir! Every thing you have preached I remember", this time holding the platter firmly, he saluted. "I shall wait for 14 years for your return. If you don't return on the next day after the completion of this exile I shall jump into fire and sacrifice myself." [132]

Rama shook his head solemnly.

All were setting out on carts, chariots and horses.

Bharata sat on the hovdah of the chief elephant with the sandal platter on his head. Satrughna fanned the sandals with a silk fan. [133]

Gradually all of them set out. Lakshmana ascending a mountain stood like a stone statue watching them.

Carts with the sounds of bells were going far.

"Are you too inclined to go, my boy?"

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131. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 112, sloka 19: Why should Rama, who tells Bharata to pardon Kaika, describe her deed as some thing done due to greed or affection or bad thought. The actual intention is to tell him, "Don't forget!" But it appears to the world as if he has pardoned Kaika! ★

132. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 112, sloka 25: Bharata was crazy *not just a little as a neem seed* but on a large scale. ★

133. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 112, sloka 29: Bharata kept those shoes "on the head of an excellent elephant". **Sarga 113, sloka 1:** "Placing the pair of wooden sandals of Rama on his head, Bharata accompanied by Satrughna, ascended the chariot." The poet is not able to decide where to keep those sandals — either on the head of the elephant or Bharata's head or separate the two and keep one on the elephant and another on Bharata. He wrote in two ways! ★

asked the inner voice with compassion.

Lakshmana did not reply.

"Why don't you tell your brother, 'I too shall go to Ayodhya, brother, sir!' and may leave?" said again the inner voice affectionately.

Lakshmana was startled. "Tsk! What sinful thoughts! Tsk! How wrong! Tsk! How sinful!" *he slapped his own cheeks* as a sign of remorse and quickly descended the mountain.

Sita standing under the *Bogada* flower tree and leaning against a branch looked at the dust rising up behind the horses. That dust also gradually settled down. All the tumult was over…Again loneliness…again…Till when? "What?" she was perplexed. "Why did I think like this?" she wondered. "I, who have come to live with my husband wherever he is….Is it because of such thoughts that elders say women are fickle minded?" She thought and stood dumb. Sita's respect increased a thousand folds for her husband from the moment Rama rejected the offer of the kingdom. What more was required than to live to serve such a paragon of men? — Sita bent her head and walked towards the hut in remorse.

Rama was very disturbed. He was strolling under the leafy canopy. When he thought deeply, "Have I done any thing wrong in preaching political morals to Bharata?", he remembered a big deficiency. He had advised Bharata to keep three spies each for ministers, but he had forgotten to advise him about the appointment of spies over those spies. From the moment that thought had come to his mind, Rama was pacing about in and out of the hut without peace.

After some time, he got vexed, sat on the seat of sacrificial grass and shut his eyes. "Spies over spies!... Spies.... Spies over spies... Spies... Kosala... Father's command — exile... spies... exile", the sounds were troublesome inside. Tears trickled down the cheeks from the corners of his eyes. For some unknown reason he was full of sorrow! Restlessness! Grief!"

Sita and Lakshmana came there, sat down kneeling before Rama and shut their eyes. Their tears too fell on the sacrificial grass.

★ ★ ★

One day when Rama was returning from the river, in the wee hours after answering a call of nature, two sages came into sight. It was usual for the sages of the neighbouring area to come there in the wee hours and Rama greeting them. In the usual manner Rama washed his feet and was coming to the shore. On seeing the sages, who had come across, he asked respectfully, "Have you completed your calls of nature comfortably, sage?"

Those sages looked at Rama and lowered their heads without replying, walked briskly towards the river.

Rama frowned in surprise and walked ahead.

When he had walked four steps, another sage came along in a hurry.

Rama saluted him smilingly and asked, "Preceptor sir, have you had free motion?"

The sage's hurry increased. He began to run away as if afraid of Rama.

Rama was surprised. At some distance a couple of sages, seeing Rama avoided him and went behind the trees.

Nothing was comprehensible to Rama. He had his bath in the river quickly and went home. No sage came to visit Rama that day. Standing under the canopy he saw some sages talking with signs on seeing Rama and going away.

Rama was agitated. 'Why do these sages behave so strangely? They used to talk to me daily with affection. Every day, the sages lauded me and talked about the elimination of Rakshasas. "For a hero like you killing Ravana is not impossible. That cruel fellow has to die in your hands. You have to start those efforts now. You have to use this forest life period to that pious task", so on they had been preaching me. I too was eager to kill Ravana. I was making promises daily saying, "I will kill the Rakshasas and guard you." In the meanwhile this change! For the sages it became eye sore to greet me! What could have gone wrong?' Rama struggled for long and finally he concluded, "All the sages might be angry. Lakshmana or Sita might have done some thing." He shouted at the top of his voice, "Lakshmana!"

Lakshmana appeared before Rama, as if he had sprouted from the earth. "What command, brother sir?"

"Have you said anything in haste to the sages?"

Lakshmana turned pale. "No, brother, sir! I have said nothing. Except for worshipping the sages, could I say anything to the sages?" He *folded his hands* in respect.

At the Rama's call, Sita also came out. Looking at Sita angrily Rama chided her and asked, "Have you neglected looking after any sage who came here?"

Sita replied trembling. "No, my lord! Whenever sages come I arrange the seats of sacrificial grass for them. I request them to eat a fruit or nut or honey — whichever is available. I never send them away without offering at least water! I have not done anything wrong, my lord!" — her eyes were filled with tears.

Rama thought for a while and immediately went out. He met an old sage and asked him with folded hands in humility, "Preceptor god! All the sages treat me indifferently! What is our fault? Has Sita or Lakshmana fallen short in their hospitality?"

That old sage was also perturbed. Looking either side, he said, "Lakshmana is a very good natured man and Sita is a very virtuous woman. We have no problem with them. It has all happened because of you."

"What! Sir? Because of me!"

"Yes, my boy, because of you. Since you have come to this hermitage, the Rakshasa pestilence towards us has increased. Never before had we experienced so much trouble from Rakshasas. Now and then they might have done some mischief, but they never so vengeful on us. Ravana's brother, one named Khara has descended down along with his followers. Since their arrival, they have been harassing sages with questions of all types."

Rama asked eagerly, "What are their questions, preceptor god?"

"What do they question, my boy? About you! 'Who is Rama? Why has he come to these parts? What conspiracies is he hatching here? Whom is he rallying behind?" so and so forth they go on asking us, it is said. All sages who came escaping from them are raising a hue and cry. When they told the Rakshasas, 'We do not know anything about Rama', they didn't heed it", the sages said. When they said, 'Rama came to live a forest life at the command of his father', the Rakshasas would laugh! 'He came on the command of his father? Or on the command of his aunt?' they heckled. What more is in store! We cannot suffer the ordeals, boy! We will select a good place and go away some where else. *If we survive we live eating at least Balusu leaves*, however wretched diet it may be! But...."

Rama understood every thing. The enemies had sensed his deliberations with some sages about the killing of Ravana some how. Ravana might have had trustworthy spies. That was why Khara might have come to find out what was happening in Chitrakuta. Now he had to think about the future course of action secretly.

Rama saluted the distinguished sage. "Sage, sir, don't you know I was born with a divine element? You may have heard that I was born to kill Ravana, haven't I? I can fight with 11 thousand soldiers at a time, I know the use of many weapons and arrows, don't I? I shall protect you. My brother and I with one blow, all the Rakshasas...."

The old sage stroking his beard said, "Why all that talk, my boy? Brahmins flatter kings in various ways. Believing all that will not save our lives. Why talk about protecting us, it will be difficult to protect yourself. You are with your wife. However competent you are, how can you fight with so many, my boy? Why this bravado?...I am an elderly man, listen to me. Believing all the praise of the sages, do not get into trouble. You too should set out for a new place. You can live happily for many more years with your wife. We are all going away now...It is your choice. The old sage turned his face away.

By then some sages had got ready for the journey, made bundles of upper clothes, dhotis, waist clothes, gathered into groups and were talking.

Rama felt terribly insulted. For sages to go away fearing Rakshasas, when he was there? Didn't they have faith that he would protect them?...Couldn't he really protect them?...Then...?? Fighting 11 thousand people...are all lies? Flattery?

Rama was reluctant to think about it. He Intended to stop their exodus some how. "Sage, sir! Chitrakuta is a very holy place, isn't it? Is it fitting for you to leave such a place?" He said in humility.

The old man said in despair, "It as a holy place, if one lives, my boy! When danger lurks around to life can we sit about and think it to be a holy place?" He expressed utter atheism.

Rama became helpless, bowed his head, unable to see their faces. He started for home.

The same day, all the sages went away with their bundles and baskets.[134]

"Why have all the sages gone away, my lord?" Sita asked many times. Whenever she asked Rama recollected 'Brahma' and plunged into 'meditation'. If he had said, "They have left for fear of the Rakshasas", she would have said, "what! When you are here!" So Rama did not get up from his meditation.

Hearing her questions Lakshmana said, "The Rakshasas are roaming untethered, sister-in-law, so they have gone away."

Sita was very excited, "What! Are the Rakshasas roaming about? Can we see them?"

They are not visible! Sister-in-law! They assume the shape they desire. We cannot trace them."

Then the Rakshasas can go anywhere the sages go? Won't they?"

Lakshmana did not reply.

Sita was disappointed.

Two or three days passed in loneliness for Rama. All the surrounding areas had become deserted. Except the presence of some tribals here and there, there was no trace of the sages. Rama never spoke to the tribals. They were always engaged in cutting wood, weaving mats and carrying logs.....always obsessed with the food! They are ignorant of the means of salvation. The life of the sages is not of that sort. They are highly noble. When all the sages were there, the lighting of sacrificial fire was seen, the Vedic chants were heard every where in the hermitages, Rama used to get self-confidence and energy. He felt confident that the gods, the ancestral gods, the Vedas, the sages and all protected him. In the absence of the sages the place looked terribly unbearable. Never should he lose their support. It is better go to those places where the sages are.

Rama said to Lakshmana very affectionately, "Lakshmana! We too shall leave this place and go!"

"Yes, brother, sir! Your command!" he said, but 'going away abandoning this house' felt Lakshmana in surprise. Right from the time of their arrival the amount of labour he had put into this house was not small? He plastered the homestead smooth like stone. He had stored dry fire-wood, to be on the safe side, in case of rain. He had cut off all the thorny bushes on the paths. He had cleaned the shore near the house and made steps to go to the river. "So it has come again to square one!" he stood hesitantly for a moment out of attachment for the house.

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[134] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 116, all slokas:** The leaving of sages making signs, Rama doubting Sita and Lakshmana, an old sage reporting about Khara's arrival, finally the departure of sages from that place — These are the incidents in this sarga. Especially, sages say (in slokas 10 and 13), 'the Rakshasas are harassing us because of you. Their harassment has increased after your arrival here!' In sloka 22, they say, 'You are with your wife. However valorous you may be, it will be difficult for you to protect your wife. You also leave this hermitage!' In sloka 23: Rama, with counter-arguments, could not stop the sages who were talking so and leaving!' This means, the sages had no faith that Rama could protect them from the Rakshasas. Is this single incident not enough for Rama not to be able to *lift his head because of the shame*? ★

Rama grasped the facial expressions of Lakshmana and said, "Lakshmana! All these surroundings are spoiled with the dung of horses and elephants when Bharata came, you see! It is not good to live in a place like this. Apart from that, Bharata and my mothers continuously remind me of their visit here. Thinking of their visit and squatting in the hut, their sorrow ringing in my ears cause me pain." So saying that self-controlled man had tears in his eyes.

Lakshmana could not bear his brother's agony. "Brother, sir! Don't feel sad. Today we can go some where, leaving this place. I can make arrangements anywhere within moments as long as I have energy. We shall start now." Lakshmana went inside the hut and placed the bundle of saris, wicket and basket out.

"Journey again!" Sita was surprised. It caused a lot of despair to Sita. There is a *Ponna* tree at the landing place on the shore of the river, which Lakshmana planted recently. That is very charming, dense and looks like a doll. Sita would bathe in that place, dry her hair under the tree and return home. Near the hut, at the foot of the mountain were flowering plants. Sita knew at once whenever a new flower blossomed. The trees were familiar to Sita like the faces of people. The birds that built nests in the mango tree near the hut were quite familiar to Sita. The evenings when they made a noise with their cries, Sita felt happy all through. During the afternoon a fawn would come jumping from the trees, skip in the yard, and slip away when she tried to catch it.

Sita would throw some blades of grass at the porch and stand watching, that fawn had been coming for four days jumping and roaming about in the rooms also. Once the fawn moved behind Sita and chomped the sari ends wetting the sari. From tomorrow it would search these rooms!

Sita's eyes moistened.

What a beautiful house!...Lakshmana had built it very deftly. Again journey!...

The following day the[135] three of them started off in the morning.

Sita walked looking back. Rama, the master of the house, who had performed house-warming ceremony observing the auspicious day and propitiation had to leave the house within a month.

Lakshmana was walking at the front carrying a bundle on his head and a basket in his hand.

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While returning to Ayodhya from Chitrakuta all through Bharata had sat with the sandal wood platter on his head. Satrughna had offered to carry it for a while, but Bharata had not given it. All through the journey during the day it was on his head and at night while he slept near his head.

All around the sandals he placed fragrant flowers, sweet scented perfumes, lavender, perfumeries all mixed together *to defeat the leather smell* making that escape and hid somewhere else.

Immediately after returning to Ayodhya, Bharata sent his mothers to their harems.

Later he told his priests and ministers, "I can not live in Ayodhya in the absence of my father and elder brother. If it is Nandigrama, I can live some how and put up with this sorrow some how."

All the priests consoled him and agreed, "Well, my boy! Do as you please", they consented.

Immediately Bharata placed the sandals on his head and journeyed. Chariots, horses, elephants and the army followed him. All the employees started out for Nandigram. All those who were interested in it accompanied Bharata.

After reaching Nandigram, arrangements

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135. 'So long as a man lives in Chitrakuta, he devotes himself entirely to virtuous acts and never sets his mind on sin', said Bharadwaja, didn't he? But, while in Chitrakuta, Rama entertained the sinful thought that 'Lakshmana was anxious to get the Kosala kingdom'. Instead of spending time on meditation just as all the sages did there, Rama began his attempts to kill Ravana from there! ★

took place on a grand scale for the coronation of the sandals. The neighbouring kings came. All royal relatives came.

In that meeting addressing the people, Bharata spoke. "People! My eldest brother Sri Rama kept his kingdom under my guardianship. His sandals will ascend the throne and protect his right. These sandals alone will protect you. They will look after your welfare."

A whispering started among the people. A week ago when people who visited Chitrakuta spoken about the sandals, none had believed then. "What is this placing of sandals on the throne? How will they rule? What mystery is this! Phew! Dirty tricks of you all!" they pooh poohed the people who had reported this .

Now, Bharata was saying the same showing them the sandals, "These will look after your welfare". People could not do anything except *pressing their cheeks* in wonder and *whispering*.

The whispering duo got separated in the tussle of the people and searched for each other.

Bharata's speech was going on. "If I hand over the kingdom of my brother to him after these fourteen years, I'll get fame exceeding four times this kingdom", he concluded his speech.[136]

The whispering duo caught hold of each other suddenly.

"See, did I not tell you in the beginning that if not for fame, would Bharata give away the kingdom for nothing?"

"Yes, it is just like what you had said! Not twice or three times, four-fold fame, he says. How shamelessly he pronounces it!"

"All right! What of it even if it is any number of times! Anyway, for getting fame, he has given away the kingdom! So it is! And for that man, placing his sandals on the throne has made his authority secure! See! As we do to reserve our seat placing our head cloths, so that nobody else snatches it in our absence, when we go to listen to *Harikatha*. It is also like that, it seems!"

"Look that side! They are doing something to the sandals! They may have oiled them well, they are shining."

The priests took the sandals out of the platter and placed the sandals on the throne. Some threw '*turmeric rice*' and flowers reciting the Vedic *mantras* (hymns). Attendants fanned them with silk fans.

The sound of the orchestra reached the skies. All royal officers came near the throne and modestly bowed and saluted the sandals.

Some priests offered lighted camphor to the sandals. They lighted lamps around the throne.

All the tributary kings came to the front of the throne, each placed the gifts they had brought before the throne, saluted in humility and said, "King of Kosala! Kindly, accept the gifts we have brought. You kindly bestow on us the good fortune of serving you for ever." They were competing with one another in bending down to the earth and showed their loyalty and respect.

The top dancer-damsels of the kingdom danced before the sandals.

The music experts sang songs lauding the sandals.

Bharata, clad in the attire of sages, stood beside the throne standing in obeisance and conducted the coronation programme.

Seeing this coronation ceremony, and still with wonder not able to believe it, and in the eagerness to narrate the strangeness to others who had not attended the function, people hurried home.

From that day commenced the rule of the sandals in Ayodhya.

The officials appealed for permission all the royal activities to the sandals standing before the throne.[137]

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136. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 115, sloka 21: See Bharata himself is giving the reason why he has given away his kingdom to Rama! 'I will get fourfold more fame than the kingdom', says Bharata! This is the 'essence' of the matter! ★

137. Ayodhya kanda, sarga 115, sloka 27, the last sloka: 'Whenever there is any matter concerning the State which comes up or whenever the tributary kings bring great gifts, Bharata reports the matter to the sandals and deals with it.' ★

Once a dispute was brought to court. A rich Brahmin had given a loan to a poor Sudra long ago. The poor man could not clear off the debt. The rich man appealed to the 'sandal king'.

The judges narrated the whole dispute to the sandals. "Great King! Sri Rama! This rich man gave a loan out his hard earnings. This poor man evaded the debt by breaking out of his word. This rich man appeals to the king for justice. Kindly grant it, king." And they saluted the sandals.

Rama's sandals posed seriously like Rama and were silent. They would always pose like that in seriousness was a matter known to all: priests, ministers, officials, people and poets.

"All right, turn to the scriptures", ordered Bharata.

At once they turned to them. It was revealed as a great crime in the codes. The judges conveyed it to the sandals trembling. "Great king, the creditor is not just other person but a Brahmin. The money earned hard by not being able to carry the loads and loads of silver and gold through gifts and charities. All codes echo that no harm should befall to a Brahmin's money. Great Lord! This poor man has committed many crimes. He broke his word. Knocked off loans, and that too knocking off Brahmin money. He caused the trouble of approaching the court to a great Brahmin. All these are the poor man's crimes. We pray to the king to impose a strong punishment and teach this man a lesson. All codes prescribe a rigorous punishment to this criminal, lord![138]

Bharata looking furiously ordered, "Question the criminal"

Following that all these questions were hurled at the criminal.

"So, man! Have you taken that loan?"

"Yes. Lord!"

"Why didn't you pay it back?"

Shivering!

Don't you know it is the money of a Brahmin?"

Again more and more shivering.

"What is your property account"

"What does that mean....?"

"Fool, do you own land?"

Mad looks!

"Do you have a dwelling place?"

Blank face!

"Why don't you talk, wretched fellow!"

"Two chicken, one goat calf, spade...a thatched hut...this covering cloth....."

"Sell them all and clear the loan to the creditor...

"Great lord! Great lord!"

Bharata said, "Hey wicked fellow! 'You will fall into the most cruel hell for knocking of Brahmin debt and failing to keep your word." Seeing the attendants, he ordered, "This fellow is a criminal. He deserves punishment. Throw him into the prison at once. This is the order of the feet of Sri Rama." He turned to the sandals and saluted them.

The attendants dragged away the debtor, to release him from debt!

In that way Kosala throne fell at the mercy of the sandals, ruled the people as the ruling should be in accordance with the codes, and justice. It shone with exceeding strangeness![139]

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[Translation: Text -**R.Venkateswara Rao.**

Foot notes: B.R.Bapuji]

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[138] On many occasions, it is mentioned that stealing a Brahmin's money or evading a debt is a great crime. For example, see sloka 44 of sarga 72 and sloka 17 of sarga 117. ★

[139] Dasaratha ought to give Kaika two boons: Bharata's coronation and forest life as an ascetic. But Bharata's coronation did not take place. To fulfil Dasaratha's promise to Kaika, coronation for Bharata must take place. After that, Bharata could give that kingdom whoever he wants. It was his will. Soon after his coronation, Bharata could keep Rama's sandals on the throne. As this did not happen, the first boon is not fulfilled.

It is the same case with the second boon also. If we look at the story happened so far, Rama has been living in the forest but not leading the life of a sage. ★

Link-2

Between the 2nd Story and the 3rd Story

[The 2nd story ended with Bharata performing the coronation for the sandals of Rama and ruling the kingdom. The 3rd story will begin with Surpanakha's arrival to Panchavati where Rama started living after his departure from Chitrakuta and roaming here and there for ten years. This link contains the story that lies between the 2nd and 3rd stories. In this link, we find 'Ayodhya kanda' to some extent and then 'Aranya kanda' begins.

There are many incidents of myths in this link. We have to understand them by means of knowledge concerning nature as well as society.]

After setting out from Chitrakuta, Lakshmana, Sita and Rama, walked in the same order, reached the hermitage of the great sage Atri.

Sage Atri's wife is Anasuya. Atri told Rama, "Rama! Long ago when all the worlds were burning with out rains for 10 years, my wife Anasuya being a great loyal wife (*mahaa pativrata*) created fruits on the trees and water in the Ganges for the sake of sages. She is a great woman, who has performed penance for 10 thousand years. She had undertaken many ferocious vows. She prevents the impediments of the penance of sages, if they encounter any. Long ago she transformed 10 nights into one in the service of the gods. It will be a highly rewarding *punya* (piety) for Sita to worship her", he said.[140]

Rama felt very happy. (*Because Sita would learn more firmly the devotion to her husband on seeing a virtuous woman with her own eyes, than just hearing from some stories*). "Sita! You have heard the words of this great Sage? Worship this great virtuous woman!", he ordered.

As soon as her husband had commanded her, Sita stood up and bowed to Anasuya *circumambulating* her in worship.

Anasuya is very old. Her body is wrinkled all over. Her hair has turned totally grey. She trembled severely. She felt glad at the humility of Sita. — "You are fortunate, my dear! You have accompanied your husband to the forests. Your devotion to your husband is praiseworthy. A woman is noble if she sticks to her husband forever irrespective of whether he is rich or pauper. The husband is a god for a woman even if he is wicked, or a womanizer. If a woman is lustful she will be unmindful of the prescribed code of conduct. For such women, not only will they get a bad name in this world, but hell in the other. Whereas women like you will saunter in to heaven.[141] So in the future also follow the code of conduct like this!" she preached. (*Anasuya might have a suspicion that in the coming days Sita's devotion to her husband may dwindle because of experience. Perhaps Anasuya's experience might have been such.*)

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[140] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 117, slokas from 5 to 13:** Anasuya is said to have produced fruits on the trees and water in the Ganges during a drought. All right, she produced it! But for whose sake? For the sake of the gods! So, the power of meditation of any person should be in the service of gods or sages or kings! Will not the common people suffer from drought? Why should it not be written that Anasuya created fruits and water for all humanity? Since the poet is not concerned with the comfort of all mankind, he would never have had that view point. ★

[141] **Ayodhya kanda, sarga 117, slokas 23 to 27:** All devoted wives abuse other women. Kausalya speaks the same words, Sita speaks the same words and Anasuya speaks the →

Sita said shyly, "I know that a husband is a god to a woman. That is what I have learnt right from childhood. I must serve my husband even if he is wicked. Is there any need to preach this, if the husband is of good qualities and character, handsome, fond of me and wishes well for me?"

(*How does a mind that respects good qualities respect bad qualities also? Then it does respect not any quality, only the corpse of her husband, the custom of worshipping that corpse! For this much why should wives go on describing their husbands' good character, handsomeness?*)

"My mother-in-law too preached to me about devotion to one's husband. I remember them all. I have heard the story of Savitri. I have heard about you also in my childhood. Rohinidevi can not live without *Chandra* (Moon), can she? I have heard many stories that there are many devoted wives in heaven.

(*See the reasons how Sita got interested in the value of devotion to her husband. Right from birth the same teaching! Her mother had taught her the same. Her father had taught her the same lesson. The teachers too, the same. Brahmins too the same. Kith and kin too, the same. The same stories and fables. After marriage her husband too did the same. Her mother-in-law ditto, father-in-law ditto. Old aged devoted wives too the same. It was the same word wherever she looked and whatever she heard. Then, is there any chance for any woman not to wish to be a devoted wife and not get into that noose? — In spite of all this, some independent souls did not become devoted wives, got prepared to go to hell! Surprising!*)

Feeling glad for Sita's humility, Anasuya said, "Sita! I have accumulated much penance with me. Wish whatever you want. I shall fulfil it."

"I wish for nothing, your kindness is enough", said Sita. (*Sita who prayed to the trees and mounds for boons, does not desire anything! — It seems she does not have the idea that Rama would be irritated if she did not ask for any thing*!)

Anasuya felt glad again. "Sita! Even if you don't ask for anything I shall grant it by myself. I have with me a divine flower garland, ornaments, a cosmetic for smearing on the body *(Angaraga)*, perfume sandal. They will never perish or wane. If you wear all these your beauty will shine divinely. Smearing this cosmetic on your body will give your husband pleasure", so saying she presented them all. (*Then what about her husband? Does sage Atri enjoy that* ***flour basket like head*** *with gray hair? Having all the material that would preserve youthfulness eternally with her, having the power of performing supra-mundane activities with her, why did not she overcome old age?*)

Sita took those articles.

Then Anasuya asked, "Tell me about how you chose your husband *(swayamvara)*! I wish to hear about it."

Sita narrated in this manner: "King Janaka was ruling the city of Mithila as per the rules ordained. Once when the king was ploughing in the field in the course of his sacrificial act *(yagna)*, I was found. (*When asked to narrate about groom selection, Sita took it up from her birth!*) Then a heavenly voice said, "Oh, King Janaka! She is your daughter! She is your daughter!" Since king Janaka was childless, he

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→ same words. These women did not know that devotion to their husbands meant slavery to men. Right from the cradle and their mothers' lullabies they are injected with the poison of this 'virtuousness'. Growing up in interior chambers, their bodies became weak and minds polluted with slavery. They remain 'chaste' and again inject that poison into their infants along with *a mixture of castor oil and breast milk*, lullabies and morals. A 'chaste' wife is one who, being a living corpse herself, moulds more such living corpses. ★

took me gladly home and gave her to his first wife.

(*Still how many more wives! We may estimate upto 300. Because, he was a king to compete with Dasaratha. Dasaratha too did not have any offspring for a long time, in spite of having had so many wives. The same was the case with this king too. So great were their 'pious' actions!*)

"She reared me like a mother. Then I attained puberty. Even if it were the Lord of the gods (Indra), if he is the father of a girl child, he will get the scorn of near and dear and outsiders. (*See how mean it is to beget a girl! Then how much meaner it is for a girl to feel that her birth is base!*) My father felt like a rudderless canoe in the sea of sorrow and then thought of announcing for the selection of a groom (*swayamvara*). There were a bow and quivers with countless arrows which Varuna had given to my father. It was very heavy. (*The bow came from Devarata, they had said earlier. Now Sita tells differently.*)

"My father invited all the kings and announced, 'I shall give my daughter in marriage to the archer who can lift this bow." (*Then this becomes the demonstration of a person's strength; how can it be called the selection of Sita of her own accord?*)

All the kings failed to lift it and returned. Later, after a long time Rama and Lakshmana came along with the sage Viswamitra. Rama not only lifted but also broke the bow. My father was very much pleased and got ready to offer me to Rama in marriage. Rama was reluctant and said, "Unless I know the opinion of my father, I will not accept." (*If the father declined, he would have given her up then! It was well known that one had to marry Sita on breaking the bow. If the father's permission was needed he should have touched the bow after consulting his father, shouldn't he?*) Then my father sent messengers to Ayodhya, invited king Dasaratha and performed my marriage. My father gave my younger sister Urmila to Lakshmana. From then on my husband and I have been leading family life as per the code of conduct", said Sita. (*According to the code of conduct laid down by scriptures!*)

It was evening by then. They stayed there that night. While setting out at dawn, all the sages cautioned Rama, "Rama! The forest will be terrible ahead. There are Rakshasas who eat the flesh of men. There are wild animals. Be careful."

(*Rakshasas eat only male meat! How good they are! How nice the story will be if Rama and Lakshmana only will be eaten up leaving Sita to herself!*)

Rama shook his head sternly, looked at Lakshmana, signaling to set out.

The three started their journey again.

(*With this ends "Ayodhya kanda" in Valmiki's Ramayana. For that matter, Aranyas (forests) came into the scene long ago. Then what is this 'Ayodhya kanda' so far?*)

Beginning of '*Aranya kanda*'

The three entered the Dandakaranya. Once upon a time it was the place of a king called Dandaka. It turned into a forest due to the curse of Sukra.

(*The poet has not said why the curse was given. Even then we can guess. When Sukra, the sage came, the king might not have stood up at once in reverence!*)

From then on the entire area was filled with the hermitages of sages, the chanting of the Vedas and holy fire places. (*So sages have occupied the entire area!*)

All the sages stood up in crowds looking while Lakshmana, Sita and Rama arrived. All of them looked at Sita 'crazily' and in the meanwhile remembered "we are sages" and looked at Rama and Lakshmana.

"Sages! We are king Dasaratha's...." began Lakshmana reciting the same account. Hearing all that, the sages looked at Rama with pleasure! (*Thinking that, even though not now, after 14 years he will become the king, anyway!*)

"Rama! King means a one fourth part of Indra! (*What an exact calculation!*) A king is powerful, either in the forest or on the throne. You alone have to protect us. The Rakshasas are harassing us in many ways. We have the ability to curse the Rakshasas (*Lest it should* *be thought otherwise!*) but, we have subdued our senses, haven't we? We do not have lust or anger. That is why we are unable to curse them. (*So, that is the power?*) You have to destroy the Rakshasas and guard us", they said. (*How do people who conquer their sense organs sense troubles? If they sense, how about subduing senses?*)

Rama shook his head seriously, smiling. That night was spent there. They commenced their journey the next morning.

They reached the middle of the forest.

Sita was glad, on seeing those thick forests. While they were walking, a terrible Rakshasa came roaring like a thunderbolt with strides that stretched each eight miles long. His physique was as huge as a mountain. His belly was like hillock. His mouth was like a cave. His eyes were like a valley each. All his body was full of blood flowing like canals. His limbs were disproportionate, around his waist there was tiger hide with blood dripping from it. (*To cover his waist, a big hide is necessary, isn't it? What a huge tiger! So there were huge Rakshasa like tigers among tigers.*). On the iron spear on his shoulder, there were 3 lions, 4 tigers, 2 wolves, 10 spotted deer, one elephant head stuck. (*What an exact calculation!*) He pounced on them roaring like thunder.

Rama is behind and he went back further.

Lakshmana is not seen from under the baggage.

Sita is caught.

(*Then Rama might have realized that the protector should be in the front not the rear!*)

The Rakshasa lifted Sita into his arms, walked ahead and laughed looking back. (*One with good sense of humour!*). "Who do you think I am? Haven't you heard the name of the famous Viradha? That Viradha is me." (*He announced his name with as much pride as Rama would announce his! **A crow is also fond of its offspring**!*) Both of you are in the attire of sages. Why do you people, performing meditation need a woman? (*Very well said, Viradha!*) She is charming. She will be my wife, O.K?" said Viradha.

Sita was quivering in the arm-pit of the Rakshasa. (*All those days Sita eagerly looked forward to meet Rakshasas and lions, only with the confidence that her husband was there to protect her. Did she ever suspect that her husband would keep quiet till a Rakshasa came and lifted her?*)

Rama was petrified. Rama, who was to offers security to all, was himself trembling, "Lakshmana! Look! Look there! My wife! My better half! The Rakshasa is embracing her! Alas! Kaika's desire is fulfilled! She has chased us to the forests with vengeance. Not only to pass on the kingdom to her son, but also to get me killed. This strategy is now crystal clear to me. (*What did Rama tell Bharata? 'Forget the fault of your mother. You must forget it'. He preached to Bharata a thousand times and this is the same Rama who made Bharata swear on the name of Sita not to utter a single word against Kaika. He simply let that slip!*) "Alas! Have I ever done any treachery to any body? I have been the well wisher of all living beings! Oh! An outsider has touched Sita! Oh! Alas! Alas! I did not feel so much grief when I lost my kingdom or when my father died as I do now.[142]

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142. Aranya kanda, sarga 2, slokas 21, 22: While talking to his father Rama said, "I will leave Sita for your sake". Now he says, "I did not feel so sad when my father died." This is nothing but prattling. Whatever characteristic society has, this ideal man too has it! See Rama weeping with tears flowing and Lakshmana chiding him! They knew well, before setting out on the exile, that Rakshasas, tigers, lions, snakes would throw them into danger, did not they? Why are they kicking up a rumpus now as if some thing unforeseen has happened? When the Rakshasa was abducting Sita, he should have saved her at once. Was it the time and situation to revile Kaika and praise himself? For that matter, if the Rakshasa lifted Sita up even in the presence of Rama, wouldn't that be a situation ridiculing Rama's heroism? A Rakshasa might have pounced on Sita when she was bathing alone in a river, or at night when the three of them were tired and asleep. Then he could have walked off with Sita. Rama, seeing the Rakshasa from a distance, should run behind him.

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Oh! He has put his arm round her waist", Rama, the hero of heroes, bewailed in a benumbed manner, helpless. (*So it was the touch of an outsider, even if a terrible and fearful Rakshasa had carried away her! It might be a hue and cry even if a male lion had dragged her.*)

On seeing his brother's grief Lakshmana got indignation. Frowning with some vexation, "Brother, sir, why do you get so much perplexed? You are a very great hero, not an ordinary man! Aren't I with you? When danger envelops, why bewail like a coward? I shall see the end of this Rakshasa. My grudge against Bharata who demanded the kingdom is still there. I shall show all that vengeance on this Rakshasa.[143]

(*Lakshmana had always been angry with Bharata. That his brother treats Bharata superior to himself. For that he should be angry with Rama, why should he be angry at Bharata?*)

Lakshmana threw the baggage angrily afar and looked at the Rakshasa mockingly and roared loudly, "Who are you, Rakshasa?" (*As if he could find no way to do any thing, unless the identity is not known!*)

"Who are you, first tell me that", Viradha roared like a thunder.

Rama obediently narrated the details. "Ours is the *Ikshvaku* dynasty! We are Kshatriyas! (*Why all these details instead of fighting with the Rakshasa. If a tiger pounces on him, would he tell, 'we are Kshatriyas!'*) Who are you and why do you roam in these Dandakaranya jungles…If you tell us a bit…. "Rama was mumbling, in front of that Rakshasa. (*For that matter the Rakshasa should have asked Rama, "Why do you wander in these forests?"*)

Viradha said carelessly, "I have already told you my name. My father is Jaya. My mother is Satahrada. Long ago I performed great penance and received a boon from Brahma. I have no death from weapons. Why do you trouble yourself? Leave this lady and run away. I will do no harm to you." He went about his way.

Sita bemoaned aloud.

Rama was angry then. "Vile fellow! Stand there! I'll kill you", so saying (*Stand there and get killed by me!*), he released an arrow. He sent seven arrows in succession. (*Don't they say that Rama's is one arrow and one word? Utter false! Many arrows and many words!*) All the arrows stuck to Viradha for some time and when he shook himself they fell down. Viradha got angry. He put Sita down, seized his spear and pounced on Rama.

Rama and Lakshmana rained arrows. Viradha shook them off laughing. Rama thinking that that was futile to shoot arrows at Viradha began to rain arrows on the spear, leaving Viradha. The spear broke. Viradha angrily lifted Rama and Lakshmana in his fists and placed them on his shoulders and started taking big strides. (*Rama might have felt relieved as the Rakshasa sat him on his shoulders instead of gulping him down!*)

Rama cried aloud, "Lakshmana! We too have to go into the forest. This guy is also going on the route we wanted to go on. We can travel comfortably sitting on his shoulders. This is good." He shouted so loud as to reach the ears of Lakshmana sitting on the other shoulder. (*Then what will happen to Sita? Getting entangled in the arms of the Rakshasa, without attempting to kill him when he was carrying them, and making foolish reasoning that, "we too have to go this route!" Will any blockhead accept this stupid argument? - Except this poet!*)

Sita was crying aloud with unforeseen fear,

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143. Aranya kanda, sarga 2, sloka 25: "I shall throw my anger on Bharata who demanded the kingdom on Viradha," says Lakshmana. They did not believe that Bharata had not demanded the kingdom! They still had wrath against Bharata who had sacrificed all his empire and sat beside the throne in a lion cloth, renouncing all pleasures! Even after taking away the sandals with reverence, Rama is reviling Kaika and Lakshmana is reviling Bharata. How is it justified? Did not the poet have the sense that it would demean those characters? ★

behind. "Alas! When the Rakshasa carried away the great heroic Rama (*Still a great hero! Wives always praise their husbands in this manner!*) Tigers or wolves eat me! Oh! Noble Rakshasa! Set them free and take me away! I bow to you," she bewailed howling.[144]

(*It seems that Sita has really lost confidence that her husband would be able to defeat the Rakshasa.She was begging the Rakshasa to take her along with him!*)

Till he heard the moaning of Sita, Rama did not remember Sita who was his better half, dutiful wife, companion and affectionate. By then he had picked up some courage. He drew out a sword from his waist and cut off the shoulder of Viradha. Lakshmana also cut off the other shoulder. (*The art they knew was cuttings off things!*)

The three fell down. The Rakshasa, unable to get up, cried rolling. Rama and Lakshmana attempting to kill him laboured hard by kicking, blowing with fist cuffs and piercing him. But all their efforts failed. Rama shaking off hands said, "It seems he has lot of power of penance. It is not possible to kill him. Let us dig a pit and bury him". (*The power of penance cannot drag one out of pits! Good gracious! There is at least one thing that the power of meditation cannot accomplish!*)

On hearing Rama's words, Viradha said, "You have overcome me in battle. So I have come to know now that you are Rama. Once upon a time I was a Gandharva called Tumbura. Kubera had cursed me to become a Rakshasa for failing to attend his service while I was deeply in romance with Rambha. (*Kubera was his master and he was Kubera's servant. If servants fail in their service their masters punish them. That is cursing! Among the gods also are present Masters and servants. Stories take place in the mould of the distinctions prevalent in human society with regard to gods also!*). He showed the way of release from the curse that when the son of Dasaratha kills me in a battle. I am released from this Rakshasa life because of you. Now, I shall go to heaven. When my life goes out, bury me in a pit. If dead Rakshasas are buried they will attain holy worlds. Rama! Sage Sarabhanga is entering fire, half a *yojana* (a distance of four miles) from here. Kindly grace the great sage also with your presence. He will reach the Brahmaloka after an audience with you," so saying Viradha gave up the life. (*Rama has not done any thing great here by his heroism. He and Lakshmana cut off each of shoulders. Viradha himself gave up his life. Then how did Rama release him from the curse!*)

By then Rama picked up courage and said, "Lakshmana! Dig a large pit to bury this fellow." So commanding, he said, "To be on the safe side, I shall see he will not rise again." He trampled firmly on the Rakshasa's neck standing in a serious manner. (*Stamped on the dead! A trick to avoid work!*)

Lakshmana dug a big pit by the side of Viradha. Rama took off his foot, tired. Lakshmana pushed the Rakshasa into the pit and covered it with earth.

Sita came and embraced Rama weeping.

Rama consoled Sita like a great hero, "Why are you afraid, Sita? Was this Rakshasa difficult to be reckoned with? Sages....me....that I can kill....11 thousand people with one blow...."

(*"Then why did you delay so much, my lord! You could have killed him even before he lifted me", Sita did not ask so, causing embarrassment to him. That is the advantage of loyal wives for husbands. They ask nothing.*)

Rama said to Lakshmana, "Lakshmana! This forest is strange to us. It seems to be difficult to go ahead. (*Already,* **'escaped death but**

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[144] **Aranya kanda, sarga 3, slokas 14 & 24:** 'On receiving those wounds, Viradha loosed his hold on Sita and brandishing his spear in fury hurled himself on Rama and Lakshmana". Viradha was carrying away those brothers. Sita is crying aloud from behind. Rama is saying thus, "Lakshmana! Let the Rakshasa carry us along the path as far as he wishes! Allow this Rakshasa to bear us according to his whim, since he is proceeding along our way." It seems that Rama is willing to leave Sita behind!

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***lost the eye'** as the saying goes!*). We heard that sage Sarabhanga's hermitage is nearby. We shall go to that place, come on! Walk ahead. I shall protect from the rear," he adjusted his sword and bow.

Lakshamana went back and collected the bundle of saris, basket and all baggage and marched ahead.

They reached the hermitage of Sarabhanga. This was the strange scene that appeared there: a man of great brilliance radiating eye blinding light rays, with silk attire, ornaments and surrounded by gods, was standing afloat in the air without touching the ground. He was Devendra. The chariot harnessed with horses was also stationary being afloat in the air. Round umbrella shining brightly also afloat in the sky and was casting shade on Devendra. Maids were fanning Devendra, themselves being afloat. All around, gods were obediently worshipping him, they too being afloat. (*The poet writes this situation 'floating' in imagination*). Thus, floating in air, Indra was talking to Sarabhanga.

Rama had only heard about Devendra until then, but had never seen him. "Lakshmana! Both of you wait here. I shall go ahead and see what's there", so saying Rama started.

On seeing Rama coming towards him, Devendra said to Sarabhanga, "Rama is coming here. I will not talk with him now. After killing Ravana, after his job is over, he can talk to me", he hastily boarded the chariot afloat and went away. (*Being afloat, why is this boarding of chariot!*)

Rama approached Sarabhanga.

Sita and Lakshmana followed. (*What is this following behind when ordered to wait there? The poet forgot that they were not to come till Rama sent word to or called them.*)

The three saluted sage Sarabhanga. Rama with curiosity asked, "Great sage! Why has Indra come?" (*He was not indignant at Indra going away on seeing him and not standing while he (Rama) was coming.*)

Shaking his beard, Sarabhanga said, "My lad! Unless one is endowed with tremendous power of meditation, one does not get self-knowledge of going to world of Brahma. That I possess such a knowledge Brahma sent Indra to get me to him. Rama! How could I go without seeing you? By receiving your grace also, I shall go to Vaikuntha. I have some pious seats in the world of Brahma and heaven. (*Like seats in parliament!*) I shall give them to you. Receive them."

Rama feeling glad and enhancing his modesty accepted it, "Be it so lord! I shall receive it." Feeling it would not be proper to accept without demur, because he would always say that Kshatriyas should always offer and not receive any thing, Rama said, "Great sage! I can offer all these pious seats to others myself." He said lauding himself. Later he asked, "If you tell me which spot is comfortable to live in this forest, I shall build a house there."

"Rama! Sage Sutikshna is nearby. He will tell you all the details. Now I shall forsake my body and go to heaven by jumping into the fire, see!" raised Sarabhanga.

At a distance a fire pit was burning. All around sages poured ghee into it reciting chants. The flames reached the sky all of a sudden. Sarabhanga entered the flames and stood there. His hair and skin were burnt to ashes. At once a boy came out of the flames, flew up, while every body was looking on. The sage who flew like that, crossing all worlds and reaching Vaikuntha saw *Para Brahma,* the supreme Brahma. Sriman Narayana welcomed the sage.

After the departure of sage Sarabhanga, all the remaining sages gathered round Rama. Among them were sages doing penance in a myriad ways ---Those born out of the tail of Brahma, nails of Brahma, and those always bathing, those taking the rays of sun and moon only as food, those pounding their physique with stones, those satisfying themselves by eating only leaves, those dipping always in the waters upto neck, those standing with out ever bending their body, those not covering their bodies in rain or chill, those inhaling only air and never having any food, those taking only some water, Those taking fallen leaves only, those satisfying themselves with bulbous roots and bulbs, those living in the trees without ever touching ground, those lying always on spread sacrificial grass, (*Would people always standing and people always lying down receive the same religious excellence (punya) or different kinds of it? In my view, they give different kinds of diseases. People in standing posture get knee joint pains, and people in lying posture get socket joint diseases. With regard to getting piety, scholars should confirm!*), those who always wearing wet cloth (*If it dries, they dip it into water always. All the time goes for wetting it. That is what meditation is!*), those reciting Vedas always, those burning amidst five kinds of fire (*those with scabies, itches, tartar teeth*) — all gathered around Rama and began lauding him, "Rama! You are the greatest in your family. You are the Lord of this entire world. You are the replica of filial devotion to father, truth and duty! You alone are capable of protecting us! (*You alone, you alone, you alone, you alone and you alone and only that 'You' is reverberating in Rama's ears.*) "Rama! The Rakshasas torment us in many ways" — (People smashing their bodies with stones, soaking in water, burning in flames, shivering in chill, starving, hanging on the trees without touching the ground afflict themselves so much and so of what reckoning is the torture of Rakshasas? What more can the Rakshasas torment than this? Should not they feel glad thinking this too is a part of meditation? Those who could grasp the suffering that, 'the Rakshasas are tormenting us', why should they suffer all these tortures in the name of meditation? What are these tortures for? "Rama, save us from these Rakshasas", said all the sages. (*Saving is not from Rakshasas, it is from the meditations and the scriptures one has to seek protection from! One has to ask the Rakshasas and atheists, not Rama*).

Rama bent his head and thought seriously. He sensed that if he fought with the Rakshasas and attempted to occupy the Rakshasa kingdoms all the sages would back him up. Laughing a bit, he said, "Should all of you implore so much? Killing the Rakshasas will be to my benefit. Even though I have come to the forests to obey my father's word, I know the exile will yield me great rewards", he said.[145]

All the sages felt happy.

Sita did not relish Rama's words.

From there they went to the hermitage of sage Sutikshana. The sage was absorbed in meditation, so his hair had been matted with mud.[146]

(*So it was the patches of mud that he had accumulated on his hair as a result of the meditation for many years! Perhaps lice and scabies too! The poet writes as if the piling of mud on the hair too is a great achievement!*)

Rama announced his boastful name as usual.

Sutikshna said, "Rama! We have heard about you. I was awaiting you. Indra went to Sarabhanga and from there came to me also and told me, 'You have attained pious places with your meditation.' (*It seems Indra would settle some affairs in a single visit and return, just as wedding invitations are distributed.*) Rama! I have not set off on a trip to heaven for your sake. I have accumulated a lot of *punya* (*apart from mud!*) I shall give away all my *punya* to you. Take it".

Rama, who knows only receiving and who does not know giving, felt very glad. "All right, I shall receive. In fact, I am the one to give pious lands to others. But tell me where can I live comfortably, great one!" asked Rama. (For a man who gives pious lands to others, some one has to indicate a comfortable place to live in! One

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145. Aranya kanda, sarga 6, sloka 24: This 'exile' will yield great results" says Rama. What kind of results? Occupying the kingdoms of Rakshasas killing them, making them his subordinates or keeping them subdued? That is the result.

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146. Aranya kanda, sarga 7, sloka 5: "*Mala panka jatadharam*" thrills the poet, seeing the dust on the pate of the sage. May be it was a sort of meditation that did not experience the sight of water at any time. So the more the dirt piles on the hair, the greater will be the *punya*! Is it sin if the hair is clean?

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has to earn piety on his own good actions, but can he take it if others give it to him. The poet collects piety from all and piles them up for Rama, obviously for victory in the coming battle.)

"This hermitage is very good, my lad! You get fruits in all seasons. There are many sages here. But there is some menace of wild animals. They frequently come and disturb the meditation, for none is there to frighten them. But for this, there is no other problem."

Rama did not like the fact that 'there were wild animals in that place'. Who could encounter them day in and day out? "Great sage, I do not like this place If I go on killing wild animals with the string of my bow resounding fiercely, the peace of this place will be disturbed. That is not to my liking", so saying, he wound up the conversation.

That night they spent there. At day break Rama said, "We shall visit the hermitages of other sages also" and set off. Some sages accompanied them too.

Sita got a chance of talking to her husband. She had been displeased with her husband's attitude for a long time. With some boldness, she said, "My lord! The great sins of this world are 'lying, being amorous of other women, doing violence without enmity'. You never lie, so the first sin does not touch you. (*Sita was a witness to Rama telling many a lie. For example, saying that he eats roots and herbs only, though taking meat*). You are not enamoured of other women, so the second sin too does not touch you. (*Fearing that her husband may take interest in other women, Sita resolutely says, "You will never do that sin!"*) Now, the third sin "why injure without enmity?" Sages praise you greatly that you are superior to Lakshmana in respect of 'detachment'. Then it is not proper to swear to kill Rakshasas, who have not harmed you. This does not seem to me proper. The ignorant and foolish people practise violence donning the garb of fierceness as a vice. It is not justifiable even to enter a forest with arrows, swords and weapons. If there is a weapon in the hand, some or other kind of violence will inevitably take place. I shall recount a story about weapon causing great harm in the life of meditation. Once upon a time Indra approached in the guise of a soldier to sabotage the meditation of a sage, gave the sage the sword in his hand and requested him to guard it till he returned. Anxious to guard it safely the sage used to keep it with him wherever he went. Gradually he forgot to meditate. He developed an interest in doing injury. He began behaving wickedly. Finally he ended up in hell. So, it is not fair to carry arms at all. What is this life of meditation on the one hand and the duty of the Kshatriya on the other? They are contradictory to each other. As long as we stay here, you have to give up arms and practice meditation. The Kshatriya duty can be taken up again after returning to Ayodhya. For that matter, why should we go to Dandakaranya at all? It is better to make a hermitage here. Why should there be a battle with Rakshasas without enmity? In the period of exile, one has to get peace and comfort in meditation alone. My mind is extremely worried about your behaviour since I wish your welfare", she stopped. Fearing that her emotional rambling might cause anger to her husband, finally she concluded obediently, "I have rambled on because of the weakness of a woman, but who is capable to recount rules of duty to you?" She stood there with her head bowed.[147]

Rama never expected even in his dreams that Sita would ask so many questions. Solemnly he looked at her, "Sita! You have seen the sages ask for my protection. I have assured them that I would relieve them from troubles. I have to protect them even without their requesting me for it. I shall never go back on my word. I shall abandon even Lakshmana, I shall abandon even you, but I shall never go back on my vow of truth. You are my dutiful wife *(dharma patni)*. You have to follow the same rule of conduct *(dharma)* as I do. You have to accept gladly whatever rule of conduct I follow without any hesitation. Do you understand that?"[148] He saw cautiously rebuking her.

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[147] **Aranya kanda, the whole of sarga 9, especially slokas, 9, 13, 27:**
We can see what Sita asked Rama.

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All the points raised by Sita are logical. Rama answered none. Sita questioned, "What is this Kshatriya duty, when you came prepared to live the life of a sage?" Rama did not answer that. Rama says, "I have given my word to the sages." "But why should that assurance be given at all in the first place?" is Sita's question. His Kshatriya commitment lapsed when he promised his father that he would "live for 14 years as a sage." Was it not only later that he gave an assurance to the sages? "Kill Rakshasas and protect us" - would any sage ask of another sage? Even if asked him would that other sage agree to do that? Rama too is also claiming that he is a sage, isn't he? "I have promised my father. I have to lead the life of a sage. I have no right to follow the Kshatriya duty." - Rama ought to tell them, oughtn't he? Moreover he is bullying Sita, "Shall I ever back out my promise? Shall I ever cross the path of Truth?" Sita argues, "Meditation on the one hand and the duty of a Kshatriya on the other. These two are contradictory." This contradiction will not disappear just because Rama bullied.

The poet made Sita ask critical questions that would possibly be raised against Rama's character. But finally the poet dismissed her reasoning by making Rama say, "You are my dutiful companion. You have to accept whatever I do". Since Sita is his dutiful companion she is fated to accept whatever Rama did, but if some one else had asked the same questions? Someone like Guha asks, "You say you are a sage, your father has commanded you to lead the life of a sage. Then why do you agree to fight with the Rakshasas? Why dream about killing Ravana?"— What would Rama say? Then there would be no chance to escape saying, "You are my dutiful wife, conduct yourself as per my will" and shut their mouths. Then what will be the answer? Will he say that he had given his word? So he will go on making new promises, bidding good-bye to the earlier promises! The poet made Sita put questions to him and finally made Sita accept that "all those questions were put, out of ignorance". By making Rama say, "I have given them my word" in reply to that in a senseless way, the poet defeated Sita's logic. But what really happened was that he had bullied Sita with 'husbandhood' just as he bullied Jabali with 'kinghood'.)

Rama started walking ahead, as it might not look nice to walk at the rear always. (*Lest Sita should ask more questions!*)

The forest is enchanting. Hills, rivers, sand dunes, flower plants, birds and a large variety of animals are coming into sight. A beautiful lake is found at a place. There many lotus flowers, swans, elephants and serpents are in sight. From that tank wonderful music and the ringing of *Veenas* (lutes), *Mridangams* (drums) and cymbals is heard. None is around. "What is this strangeness, sage", asked Rama of a sage called Dharmabrita, who was one among the sages accompanying them.

The sage said this: "Rama! It is called Lake Panchapsara. A sage named Maandakarni did fierce penance for 10 thousand years. The gods feared that the sage might ask for the position of one of them and so sent 5 heavenly damsels to spoil his meditation. This sage, in spite of knowing everything, fell into the clutches of cupid, thinking that it was a 'divine design'. (*One may raise a doubt about a sage yielding to lust, so the poet is offering an explanation by calling it 'divine design'.*) The sage became 'youthful' by the power of his meditation and in order to make love with those damsels he created this lake. (*The poet brings in the pretext 'power of meditation' to offer explanation to those who say, "What is this? An old man of 10 thousand years 'enjoying' himself with women?*) All the heavenly damsels were enjoy-

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148. Aranya kanda, sarga 10, slokas 9 & 12: Rama might leave Sita even! Might leave Lakshmana even! But never would abandon truth! It was known what might happen if he had abandoned Lakshmana for a day! What would his Lordship have eaten? ★

ing the music playing drums, lyres and cymbals. That is this music now". (*So all of them are in the lake now, like frogs in water!*)

Rama widened his eyes and wondered, "So, there may be such things too."

After that they went to the hermitage of sages nearby. They stayed there for a long time. From there they visited the hermitages of sages they[149] were acquainted with --- for ten years.

(*Lakshmana's bundle became ligh during that ten year period.*)

Again they returned to the hermitage of Sutikshana. After spending some time there Rama asked Sutikshana, "I have heard that sage Agastya lives here some where in this forest. I do not know that place, where is he? I shall offer my obeisance to him also." (*For 10 long years Rama did not know the hermitage of Agastya! Shame! Shame! Nobody told him about it! Rama had that much influence!*)

Sutikshana is pleased and said, "Rama! I myself wanted to tell you! You have asked yourself. Go south a distance of four coss *(yojanas)*. There you will find the hermitage of Agastya's younger brother sage Sudarshana. From there you can reach the hermitage of Agastya. Now, hurry up." He hastened Rama. (*So sages also find it embarrassing, if relations stay on for long, without anything to do. That is why he hastened them to start at once!*)

Rama set off again. On the way he narrated the story of Agastya to Laskshmana. 'Lakshmana! Once upon a time two Rakshasa brothers lived in this area. They were called Ilvala and Vatapi. Ilvala used to invite Brahmins for the ancestral annual ceremonies in the guise of a Brahmin, speaking in Sanskrit. He used to serve a meal to the Brahmins, killing Vatapi who he would transform into a goat (*So Brahmins used to eat meat heartily!*). After the meals, Ilvala would call out "Vatapi! Come out!" On hearing the call of his elder brother, Vatapi would come out tearing the bellies of those Brahmins bleating like a goat. (*Did Vatapi come piece after piece from each belly and get patched up into a whole body? How interesting would it be to see such a sight of patching up into a whole!*) In that way the Rakshasas were killing thousands of Brahmins. All the gods prayed to Agastya — to protect the Brahmins and punish the Rakshasas. One day Agastya went to Ilvala's house and as usual took a meal with meat. Ilvala called out in his usual manner, "Vatapi! Come out!" Vatapi did not come out. Agastya said laughing, "Your brother is digested in my stomach and has gone to hell." (*His stomach might be that hell!*) Ilvala got infuriated and was about to jump on Agastya to kill him. Agastya killed Ilvala also by burning him with his eyes." By the time the story concluded they had reached the hermitage of sage Sudarsana. They spent that night there and set off the following morning. (*Good gracious, it seemed that this sage had not done any thing great!*)

On the way, Rama resumed his narration, "Lakshmana! Long ago the Vindhya Mountain attempted to stop the sun. Agastya angrily commanded it to 'stop!' From then the mountain ceased to grow and remained like that. Lakshmana! In the hermitage of Agastya, sages board aircrafts and go to heaven. Gods bestow on them *Yakshahood*, immortality or kingly pleasures." (*He did not know where Agastya stayed, but now he narrated as if he is familiar with everything. It is not even saying, 'I have heard so!*) "Lakshmana! I shall spend the remaining period of exile in this hermitage. See, there is the hermitage. Go ahead and tell them I

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149. Aranya kanda, sarga 11, slokas 25, 26: Ten years time of exile was over in two slokas. The period spent in hermitages is counted as a month, month and a half, year, eleven months, four months, three months ¾ because in each line of the sloka words suitable for rhyme should be used, "Masa, dasama masa, charuto masa, teen masa, shadzamasa" and so on. '10 years rolled by', concluded the poet. Rama had been carrying out the task of ending the menace of the Rakshasas.

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have come", he commanded.[150]

Lakshmana went into the hermitage, putting down the bundle, bowed to the disciples of Agastya. "The eldest son of king Dasaratha has come along with his wife. I am his younger brother. I am called Lakshmana. My father exiled us unjustly into the forests being lustful of a woman. We have come to visit sage Agastya", he said as if he had recited a lesson with eyes shut and after that opened his eyes.

The disciples went in and informed their teacher.

"Get Rama here", said Agastya.

Rama entered the prayer chamber, the enclosure of worship, and saw the icons of all the gods.

Agastya said to Rama in this way: "Rama! I have perceived from the power of my meditation that your father exiled you to the forests unjustly. Do not grieve", he consoled. (*Even in the power of meditation the exile of Rama appeared unjust!*) Agastya treated his guests kindly, served them food fit for sages with herbs, roots and fruits. (*He did not get 'meat' for relatives, how clever this sage sage!*) Then he showed them some weapons. "Rama! This bow belongs to Vishnu. Brahma has given this arrow. Indra gave me this quiver. This sword also is from Indra. I shall give all these to you, receive them", he gave them all. (*While serving food, offering roots and herbs in the manner fit for sages and later giving weapons in the manner fit to kings! In fact, why do gods give arms to meditating sages? In the past were not aged people in a clan society, passing on their arms to others in their clan? That assumed the form of a story here. But is unsuited to the context! Why give arms to a fellow who ought to live the life of a sage?*)

After that Agastya saw Sita and praised her. "Rama, your wife accompanying you to the forest is suffering a lot. It is the nature of women to show affection where a husband is comfortable and neglect him when husband is in troubles. It has been the nature of women since creation took place. Women are fickle minded and cruel. They act without thinking. (*The poet does not feel comfortable if women are not rebuked in as many ways as possible.*) But Rama, your wife is not of that type. She is a great devoted wife like Arundhati", he praised Sita.

Bowing to Agastya, Rama said, "Sage Agastya! Kindly suggest a suitable place for me to build a hermitage".

(*"I will spend the rest of the exile period in Agastya's hermitage" these words which he had said in the previous part of the day vanished into thin air. He remembered about an abode now, after 10 years.*)

Agastya thought about it. "My lad! There is a place called Panchavati at a distance of two coss *(yojanas)*. There is no dearth of fruits, water and animals. (*Why should a man who served food fit for sages, talk about 'hunting animals'?*) The Godavary is very close. The place is beautiful. There are plenty of bulbs and roots available. It will be very clean and enchanting. There won't be any people. Build a cottage there and spend the remaining time of your exile there! You, accompanied by your wife, are capable of protecting sages — (*"You are with your wife. It will be difficult for you to protect yourself", another sage had said earlier in Chitrakuta! It seems there are differences among the perspectives of sages!*) —"See there! If you go through that *Ippa* tree grove you come across a huge Banyan tree. Crossing that you will find a mountain. Nearby that, the garden there will be in full bloom and beautiful", he gave the details.

Rama bowed to him and set off again.

Lakshmana's bundle became heavier with the weapons.

On the way a mammoth bird appeared in the Banyan tree which Agasthya had described. Rama thought it was a Rakshasa. Pacing two steps back, he cried solemnly, "Who are you?" (*Is it to decide, whether to walk or run, if the identity is known?*)

That bird amiably said, "My lad! I am a

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150. Aranya kanda, sarga 11, sloka 88: Rama says that he will spend the remaining exile period in the hermitage of Agastya. But see, where he spent that period. ★

friend of your father."

Rama came forward by a step, bowed to the bird hesitantly and said, "Reveal your caste and '*gotra*' clearly." (*We are far better. We ask the 'castes' of humans only!*)

The bird narrated the origins of all kinds of animals, besides revealing to him its own caste in this way. "Rama there were many Prajapatis (creators) once upon a time. Among them Daksha prajapati had 6 daughters. From among them Kasyapa married 8 and said, "Procreate heroes like me" (*'Give birth to offspring' is also a command*). Among those women Aditi, Diti, Kalika and Danu obeyed the command of their husband more. Aditi gave birth to twelve Adityas, eight Vasus, eleven Rudras and Aswini gods. Diti had Rakshasas. Danu produced a son Aswagriva. Kalika gave birth to sons called Naraka and Kalika. These four were concerned about the husband's dictum.

The remaining four were not bothered and gave birth to swans, hawks, lions and tigers. They procreated monkeys, baboons, cows, horses and serpents. One wife gave birth to a daughter called Nata. Nata's daughter was Vinata. Another wife called Manu gave birth to the human race like Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. (*Oh! So Brahmins and Sudras are brothers born of the same womb!*) One wife gave birth to fruiting trees. One gave birth to Adisesha (Primeval serpent). (*If the listener is Rama, stories are of this fashion!*) Rama! Vinata had sons named Garuda and Aruna. Aruna is my father. (*Vinata's mother had no respect for her husband's word. That is, this bird's grandmother — was not a devoted wife!*) I am known as Jatayu. If you trust my words, I shall come along with you. This forest is ferocious. When you and Lakshmana go hunting I shall protect Sita", said Jatayu.

Rama felt greatly relieved. Embraced Jatayu and asked him to come along.

Rama entered Panchavati with the determined intention of killing Rakshasas.

That place is beautiful with trees. Rama felt that place to be safe.

Rama seated under a tree, and said, "Lakshamana, go round the place and see where it is convenient for us to build a cottage."

Lakshmana put down the bundle, saluted and said, "I am not independent. I am your servant. I do not take any decision independently. You decide on the place and command me. There I shall build the cottage." He stood bowing.[151]

Rama felt very happy. (*If all bow down, Rama likes it very much*). He stood up and surveyed all around and decided on a particular spot.

Nearby was the Godavary. Surrounding the spot, there were big trees. The ground was flat. It was convenient for Jatayu to reside in those trees. Rama smiling solemnly and holding Lakshmana's hands said, "Lakshmana! This place is even. I have decided. Build the cottage here." (*Had Rama ever held Lakshmana's hands earlier? Now Lakshmana has to build a house, doesn't he?*)

Lakshmana was elated and plunged into the task. He cut the trees. He sharpened branches. He put in the pegs. Lifted the rafters. Cut the bamboo and made the roof. He fastened palm leaves on that. He made walls with clay. He cleared the ground. Made paths. He cut steps in the ford of the river. He completed it and arranged for the propitiation of '*vastu*' and showed that to his brother. (*Till then, Rama might have been cozily dozing or sauntering about on Jatayu.*)

Seeing Lakshmana construct the house, though unwilling to appreciate him, outwardly showed his happiness. Rama drew Lakshmana near. "Lakshmana! I am very glad for your service. See I embrace you. This is my gift for your service. What more do you require than my kindness? — You are clever to grasp my ideas as and when required. You know how to please me by serving me. Seeing you understand my likes and dislikes, I feel my father has not passed

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151. Aranya kanda, sarga 15, sloka 7:
Lakshmana says he is not independent and he is a servant of Rama. ★

away. I know you treat me as a father treats his son", he went on flattering Lakshmana.[152]

(*Would he make his father build a house, while he sat leisurely? Should the older brother look after his younger brother's weal or woe or should it be the other way round? His style has been topsy-turvy right from the beginning.*)

Lakshmana is in a state of confusion. Not able to understand whether he is father, older brother or servant to Rama, he felt happy.

Life is normal again.

Sita felt comfortable there.

"Still more than three years...." Thought Rama.

After they began their residence in Panchavati, autumn was over and the first of half of the winter season came. One day when Rama was going to the river for a bath, Lakshmana followed him with a tumbler in hand (*Might have to clean his back daily*) and started a conversation. Consequent to his brother embracing him, Lakshmana felt closer to Rama, "Brother, sir, look at the surroundings. The beauty of the arrival of early winter is seen. In this season people get amorous (*except himself*). Kings prepare for launching raids. Moon light nights, filled with dew, being less in glare, appear like Sita tired of sun." (*He gets bolder, by the way.*)

For some time the talk went in appreciation of the beauty of early winter and then slipped into abusing Kaika. "How does Bharata live, being away from your presence and in separation? Giving up all pleasures and romance with women, does he sleep on bare ground? (*Should wives be left out in the life of a sage? Then why do the sages have wives? Rama is there along with his wife, isn't he?*) Fearing public censure, he may be going to the Sarayu for a bath in the nights. In the view prevalent among people, sons follow the mother's temperament more than they follow the fathers' temperament. Bharata has proved it false. (*It means that father's nature is good and mother's nature is bad. Generally sons become vile like mothers, he says. But Bharata became a good man like his father. Lakshmana is trying to express his jealousy for Bharata, perceiving Rama's view about Bharata.*)

How is it that Kaika has become so villainous even though she had a gem of a husband like Dasaratha and a mellow son like Bharata?" (*Lakshmana knows that reviling Kaika would please Rama. Rebuking Kaika is also a part of his duty serving his brother.*)

Rama did not appear pleased with Lakshmana's talk. (*At present Rama is not trembling in the arms of any Rakshasa. House, wife, servant brother, and Jatayu protecting him from any danger — every thing is normal. So his anger of Kaika had abated a little.*) He slightly rebuked Lakshmana mildly, "Lakshmana! Don't rebuke Kaika. She is the *middle wife* our father!"[153]

"It is not proper for us to abuse Kaika", said Rama. "But say some thing more about Bharata, I shall listen. My mind is eager to know about him", he said.

Lakshmana felt disappointed and walked on swinging the tumbler without saying any thing.

(*With this ends the Aranya kanda till 16 sargas. 17 th sarga begins with the incident of the arrival of Surpanakha. That makes the 3rd story in this book.*) ★

[Translation: **R.Venkateswara Rao**]

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[152] **Aranya kanda, sarga 15, slokas 28, 29:** See how deceptively Rama talks flattering Lakshmana for building the house. ★

[153] **Aranya kanda, sarga 16, sloka 37:** The poet himself stated that Dasaratha had 353 wives. Out of them only three are connected to this story. Kaika is the youngest of them. But now she has become the middle one! Perhaps Dasaratha might have married two more. Rama must have known that secret. If not how could the youngest wife become the middle ones? ★

Story-3

This is How it Happened!

[In sargas 17 and 18 of Aranya kanda in Valmiki *Ramayana*, Surpanakha's story is as follows:

Sitting in the hut, Rama was telling stories to Sita. Surpanakha, who had seen the handsome personality of Rama on an earlier occasion, was enamoured of him and has now come to his hut.

Her appearance: an ugly face, disgusting gaze, a huge stomach, copper coloured hair, terrifyingly hoarse voice, old age, distorted speech and crooked limbs!

Rama's appearance: most handsome face, long arms, narrow waist, wide eyes, serene voice and traditional mannerisms.

Looking at Rama, Surpanakha came closer to him. "Who are you? You are in the attire of a sage. Carrying bow and arrows. (*He carries bow and arrows even he was home narrating stories!*) Why have you come here?", she asked.

Being an honest man, he narrated everything: about his birth, Sita's birth, his exile to forest due to the treachery of his step-mother. (*He told everything but concealed the fact that he had come to Panchavati for the purpose of killing the Rakshasas and of his plans to kill Ravana! Honest man, indeed!*)

After telling her about himself, Rama asked her, "You look ugly. You appear to be a Rakshasa. Who are you? Which tribe do you belong to? Who are your parents?" (*He asked her for ten times more than what he had told her. Leisurely conversation with a Rakshasa! What, then, is frightening in that Rakshasa! This means, one need not spring into action immediately and shoot arrows at the sight of Rakshasas to kill them as one would lions or snakes. It also means, one could allow them to sit beside him and engage in an easy conversation!*)

The Rakshasa said, "Rama! I am a Rakshasa called Surpanakha. I can appear in any form I like!" (*A person who is capable of appearing in any form she likes, will she appear in an ugly and repulsive form when she wants the love of a man? Did Surpanakha think that the form in which she appeared before Rama was beautiful and hence she had appeared in that form? No, even in her view, that appearance was not beautiful. When she sees Sita, she says contemptuously, "Sita has a pot like belly, she is old. She is ugly." This means, Surpanakha also knew that it was not beautiful to have such an appearance. But she had appeared in an ugly form even though she knew what beauty was! Listen to what else she is saying!*)

I wander around the forest here terrifying every living creature. Ravana, Kumbhakarna, Vibhishana and Kharadushana are my brothers. Vibhishana is a virtuous man with no traits of a Rakshasa. (*'Vibhishana has no traits of a Rakshasa. I have many unjust traits. I terrify everybody. I am a bad woman', says Surpanakha!*)

Away from all my brothers, I wander about freely in this forest. Rama! The moment I saw you, I thought of you as my husband in my mind. You should be my husband for a long time. We will together saunter about in this forest. Why do you need Sita? The ugly face, pot like belly, and the old woman!"

(*Surpanakha does know what features make a woman look ugly. Yet she came in that ugly form! Surpanakha is telling Rama that she wants a permanent bond with him and not a temporary sexual desire for him. The poet depicts Rama that even men themselves are enamoured of Rama. Then it is not a matter of surprise if a woman is enamoured of Rama.*

Further, it is a widespread practice that men go for several marriages. Hence, Surpanakha asked him that.)

Rama laughed and said ironically, "My wife is with me. (*If she wasn't, he would have accepted the 'offer'!*) My brother doesn't have his wife here. It has been a long time since he has enjoyed conjugal pleasures with his wife. It seems he is eager to enjoy conjugal pleasures. Also, it is not good for a woman like you to have a rival wife. Make Lakshmana your husband." (*Have we ever seen Rama laughing? Laughing and mocking while talking to another woman! To the woman who desired him, Rama is showing his brother!*)

Immediately, Surpanakha went to Lakshmana and asked, "I am the right wife for a handsome man like you. Saunter along with me in this forest!"

Lakshmana laughed sarcastically and said, "I am a servant for Rama. Why do you also become a slave by marrying a slave? (*So, Lakshmana does know that slavery to Rama isn't a respectable thing to do!*) Be the younger wife of Rama. He will leave Sita and love you."[154]

Surpanakha went back to Rama again. "You are not accepting me because of Sita. I will kill her," saying so Surpanakha ran toward Sita.

Rama angrily ordered, "Lakshmana! You should not joke with wretched people. Disfigure this ugly woman!"

Lakshmana took out his sword and cut off the nose and ears of Surpanakha.

Bleeding profusely and screaming, Surpanakha ran away.

(*The older brother asked her to go to the younger brother and the younger brother asked her to go back to the older brother; these insults are enough! Rama could protect Sita without doing any thing to Surpanakha. Unless he had the intention that he 'should hurt Ravana's sister', it was not necessary to cut off Surpanakha's nose and ears.*)

As soon as Surpanakha came, Rama conversed with her for some time; confided to her why he had come to the forest in exile, how his step-mother had betrayed him and joked with her for some time and finally left her after torturing her.

In this scene, the poet has narrated joyously that it was a fitting action against her since she had tried to kill Sita.

This is the story of Surpanakha, which the poet has depicted.

In this story, ***This is How it Happened!*** Surpanakha is a human female. She is like all other women. She saw Rama, enamoured with his appearance and wished to become his wife. She asked him about it. He could agree if he liked or reject her if didn't.

In this story there is no mention of Surpanakha, who is a human female, running toward Sita to kill her. Rama and Lakshmana tortured her as they knew that she was Ravana's younger sister and she belonged to the hostile tribe.

Injuring, torturing and killing enemies with swords were considered to be great valorous acts. Rama and Lakshmana are valorous, aren't they? Wherever there is some scope, it is their morality to commit cruel acts!]

In the soft sunshine of the evening...in that forest...a young beautiful woman...walking in the shadows of the trees...immersed in thoughts.

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154. To examine the point whether Rama had wives other than Sita, we have seen in the episode in which Manthara appeared. Here Rama tells Surpanakha, "My wife is with me." This means, he does not have other wives. Lakshmana also says to Surpanakha, "Be a younger wife of Rama". This means, Rama had no wife other than Sita. Therefore, there is no evidence even in this context to infer that Rama had other wives besides Sita. ★

Birds were flying freely around her. Deer were roaming here and there. Jumping about on the branches of trees the peacocks were cooing.

Walking through the long shadows of trees, she stopped under a tree, leaned against a branch, lifted her head and looked at the slow moving clouds. The captivating figure she had seen in her dream last night was leaving her in a trance every moment. Those wide eyes…long arms…that blue skin colour…beautiful smile…that charming figure she had never seen before seemed to really appear in front of her eyes. 'Is there a human being like that in this world? Where is he? Who is that virtuous woman that had given him birth? Who is the fortunate woman into whose heart he has entered?…Where? Where can I find him?'

'Illusion…It is all illusion…a dream… a dream burst like a water bubble! Is that it?…a dream?…just a lie?'

Grief spread all over her face. Not able to stand there, she continued walking aimlessly.

'For so long…so many years…how happily and without a worry did I live in this forest! Never…never…did I feel this much agony? No dream has ever caused me this much sorrow! Never had I had such a sweet feeling! Is love so beautiful? So delightful? Has love dawned in an empty heart like sunrise on a dark world!'

'Who is that handsome man? If only he appears, wouldn't I fall at his feet? Wouldn't I achieve his love with my prayers? Wouldn't living with him make this a fulfilled life? Ah, even thinking about him makes my whole body tingle with excitement! What a sweet conversation! What an extraordinarily nice day!'

Swinging between hope and despair, looking into the dream worlds…with a sad face…that worshipper of love who is sauntering slowly in the middle of the forest…That beautiful woman is Surpanakha. She is the dear sister of Ravana, Lanka's ruler, who is superior to the gods in riches. Her nature is different from that of ordinary royal women. She does not accept the services of the maid servants. She has left behind the royal comforts and luxuries like swan's down-beds, sauntering in the table lands and woods of *Dandakanranya* which she loved as her residence. She is a free woman who has never surrendered to the affection and authority of her elder brothers. She always plays lovingly and fearlessly with the birds and animals around her. She greets every plant in the forest, plucks all the flowers she liked, wears them, adores the birds and animals with flowers and laughs at them. Her body is as delicate as she is gentle at heart. The natural beauty of the forests is *food for her eyes*.

Today, she is not interested in the beauty around her. Without looking at either newly blossomed flowers or the silver linings of the clouds, she is immersed in a deep thought and sauntering along the bank of the Godavari near Panchavati. Then surprisingly, she saw a wonderful scene at a distance! It was the same handsome man! The same figure…same eyes…the same long arms…very familiar to her! The same complexion…It was him…It was him…her lover in her dreams! 'Is it real! Hope this is not another dream! Has he appeared in person! Has my dream come true!'

Walking slowly with enchantment, Surpanakha proceeded looking at that figure without moving her eyelids.

He is none other than Rama, who is living in the forest as commanded by his father! Whatever be the reason this person appeared to Surpanakha as highly virtuous and handsome — the unkempt knotted hair, tawny coarse fibre clothes, bow hung on the shoulder, the sheathed sword, very dark skin, his arms appeared long for he was very tall. Surpanakha, who wandered the forest every day, must have seen many such hunters. Yet, what was special that she saw in a person who looked like a hunter! She might have been overwhelmed by the influence of the strange dream. As she looked at that person, her heart beat faster. She stopped, wondering as if the goddess of forest has appeared in front of her as a reward for her love of nature.

Rama, who was probably returning from answering nature's call, washed his feet in the Godavari and came up the river bank taking big strides. He was not paying attention to the surroundings. The trees all along the bank leant on the river, and another forest appeared in the womb of the river. All the trees were in full blossom. Some broken branches laden with flowers fell into the water and moved on the waves like boats of flower. The trees were full of birds, playfully alighting on and flying off, chirping in causeless joy. In the distance an elephant was sucking water up in its trunk and spraying on its own shadow. Rabbits were peeping out of bushes and suddenly disappearing. Peacocks that sat on the trees under which Rama was walking were cooing enthusiastically looking up at the clouds.

Rama continued walking along the river bank with big strides. He did not find any thing new in any scene or sound. He was used to the beauty of the surroundings along the river as much as he was to nature's calls.

As that man had not noticed her, Surpanakha stopped there disappointed. She was ashamed to follow him speedily. But she felt disturbed as he walked away. Her heart sank with the thought of losing that handsome man. Distressed without quite knowing why, and grieving under the spell of Rama, she followed him.

Rama walked briskly and had to turn back suddenly. A branch of a flowering plant had got caught in the knot of his hair and forced him to stop. Rama knitted his eyebrows and in an attempt to dislodge the branch from his hair, looked back. He was startled. He forgot to remove the branch. With the flower-laden branch bent and stuck on his hair, it was unclear whether the tree grew out of him or the tree had borne him as a flower.

Bashful, Surpanakha stopped and lowered her head.

Rama recovered, broke off the branch and threw it into the water, mended his hair-knot and began to walk again. Just as vines entwine trees, his thoughts crawled around her. Rama tried to walk away dragging his heavy feet.

He looked back again with a trembling heart! There she was, walking with a downcast look and tidying up her bangs as her upper garment fluttered in the wind like the wings of birds!

Rama's pace slowed a bit.

"Who is this woman? So beautiful she is! That white garment…garlands…that elegant gait…looks like a goddess? What do I care who she is? I will go my way. She might have come to some hermitage! May be her attendants are behind!

However much he tried, Rama's walking could not continue. He bent down, lifted the flowers crushed under his feet and threw them into the water. He adjusted his bow, and the sword. Without turning back completely, he looked from the corners of his eyes. Moving around hesitantly at the same place, he stayed where he was, looking somewhere.

Surpanakha came a couple of feet away from him. Her happiness was boundless while looking at Rama from so close. She was so anxious that, if she delayed further, the godly figure might disappear due to her fault. But not knowing what to do, she remained silent for a moment.

Looking at that beautiful woman beside him, Rama stood forgot himself. He himself did not know that he had such a longing for beauty.

In her eagerness to do something and unable to restrain herself from doing it, Surpanakha tried to express her entire heart in her very first word, she said involuntarily, "My love! Is that you?"

Rama was startled.

Rama, who was reputed as some one who treated all other women as mothers, could not treat Surpanakha like that. For some time, he could not turn away his eyes from her face.

In a soft sweet tone filled with heavy shyness, Surpanakha revealed her mind. "How many ages have I waited for the fortune of seeing you! The promise you made in the dream…that you'll meet me again…"

Trying to look serenely, Rama asked, "O, Beautiful lady! Who are you? What is your name?"

Surpanakha said smilingly, "Don't you know who I am? Don't you recognize my love and devotion to you? You want only my name?"

"O beautiful lady! How will I know who you are if you don't tell your name? Why are you here in this forest? Do you have parents? What is your caste?…Your sect?" Rama showered her with questions, of course, serenely.

"Lord! Do such questions befit you? Is my family background and all that of interest to you? My name is Surpanakha. I have many close friends and blood relatives. Yet, I don't belong to any one. I am an independent person. To satisfy your curiosity, I will tell you one thing. Ravana, the emperor of Lanka, is one of my elder brothers," said Surpanakha and bowed her head with a smile.

Rama looked curious and surprised.

Ravana's sister!…Ravana's sister!

It might be possible to get some information about her brother from her!…I should talk to her as if I don't have any interest. Looks like the woman has come here with infatuation!

"…I have heard his name", said Rama looking at Surpanakha with a smile. "You are young! You are beautiful! Amidst these trees…hills…lonely…"

Surpanakha looked around to a broad sweep with a gentle smile. "These flying birds…these crying animals…in the midst of so many fellow living creatures; with this breeze touching the body…with these sounds reaching the ears…with these colours that give life to the eyes, with the sun and moon who greet every day…in the midst of so many natural sensations — loneliness for a human being?" She looked at him with dismay.

Rama was a bit surprised. "She has learnt how to speak well! It seems she has received education from good teachers. Are all the Rakshasa women so intelligent and free? — "O beautiful lass! Are you married? It doesn't look like you are", said Rama, looking at her from head to toe.

Surpanakha, having high regard for her lover, tried to look at his behaviour favourably. Yet, she felt a bit disappointed and said, "My lord! Why do you have to know such things about me? I have not asked you even one question, have I? I am not a bit interested in your life history and lineages, am I?" She lowered her head.

Pride glowed in Rama's eyes. "I was going to tell you about that myself. We are descendants of the Sun god. Ours is the Kosala kingdom. Ayodhya is our city. The great king Dasaratha is our father. My name is Sri Ramachandra." Rama paused for a while, in anticipation that she would be astonished with what he had just revealed. He mentioned the names of his family, his birth place, his father and his own name as if they were great pieces of information. He looked with confidence as if none, had such great families, birth places, fathers and names.

Surpanakha was looking at a flower-laden raft floating slowly down the river like a boat with its sails down. Looking at the water birds playing: landing on and flying off the raft.

"Do you hear me? I was born a son of a great king. But what is the use? Just as I was going to be sworn in as the king in a day or two, *the skies fell down.* My step-mother has a crooked mentality. She demanded from my father the kingdom for her son and sent me to the forests. My father had made some promise to her some time ago. All the things that he did were of this type…It was unavoidable. I have been undergoing this punishment in these wild forests for ten or fifteen years. What should I do?" Rama looked sadly.

Watching a pair of birds, Surpanakha listened to Rama with dismay. As her beautiful eyes widened, Rama loved looking at her. "What! Is sending some one to live in the forests a punishment!" In disbelief, she looked all around her. Whichever direction she looked, she saw a beautiful sight. She looked at the sky, looked at Godavari, and peered at the tree tops. She then looked into Rama's eyes, as though collecting beautiful scenes from distant places. "You came to this incredibly lovely place as a punishment? These trees laden with clean, sweet fruits, cool lakes filled with Lilies, springs running down the high mountains, flocks of birds enthusiastically flying among clouds day and night, a sunrise that looks like moonrise in the thick morning mist, the walk ways in the mornings with all those fallen flowers, cool breezes, grassy meadows with dew drops spraying rainbow colours — aren't these natural images familiar to you? The beauty of these river banks laden with flowers…the peculiar chirping of the birds…the thrill of the roars of wild animals…these fragrance-filled moon-lit nights…do you think of your life in the midst of such natural beauty and elegance as a punishment? Is that it? Do you have no joy in living like this? Don't you feel any sense of gratitude to your father's younger wife for she gave you the boon of enjoying the beauty of this forest?" She looked at him astonished.

Rama became speechless. While the whole world was proclaiming that Kaikeyi had sent him to this cruel punishment, this foolish woman is depicting the life in *Dandakaranya* as a boon!

Rama sat still there on a big rock half submerged in water. Looking at Surpanakha as if he was trying to convince her, he said, "Is there joy in a forest? What joy? Because I am committed to obey the commands of my father I came here as there was no way out. Daily, there is a fear of wild animals, isn't it?

We can't say when some animals might attack, can we? We have to always roam wearing these arrows and swords. When we first came here, this place was full of snakes and scorpions. How could we shoot them with arrows? And you know what happened one day? A great sage, a great ascetic visited us. He was resting after dinner when a large black scorpion crawled into his lower garment. You should have heard his screams, seen him jump around. And that happened in spite of my brother keep watch over him *with thousand eyes*!

Surpanakha kept listening to all this with a smile.

"And another problem is the menace of Rakshasas! You never know who will come and what tricks he will play on you. The other day my wife was taking a nap lying by my side, a crow came down and started pecking at her. I didn't bother because it was just a crow. But they said it was not a crow but Kakasura, a Rakshasa. We had a fight with that fellow. On another occasion, some guy, named Viradha or Boradha came in our way suddenly and lifted Sita in his arms. I felt aggrieved — who knows where he touched my wife…."

Surpanakha was not in a mood to listen to him. That he had a wife worried her deeply.

"Do you know how I felt when an other man touched my wife? I didn't feel that sad even when I lost the kingdom, not even when my father died. Every day brings a new disaster in this forest. We, men, can manage somehow, but to protect a woman is difficult. I am always worried how the rest of the days will pass. I don't know how these fourteen years will pass…" Rama sighed.

Surpanakha sighed even deeper. "Should a brave, heroic man like you talk this way, my lord? Have these temporary, minor inconveniences disturbed your forest life? Will you go back to your city at the end of the exile period?"

"Why not? I will! I am just waiting eagerly."

"Oh, no! Hasn't living in the midst of such natural beauty for so many years fascinated you? Having lived for so long in these peaceful surrounds, having enjoyed such splendour, are you so eager for that mean royal life — those cities, behind ramparts, behind doors, in those mansions — for life like that of a bird in a cage? To that capital city, which bristles with constant fear of enemy attacks, thick in crooked political plots, shackles of commands tightened by priests, beset by hardships, tears and sorrowful cries of the people — that terrifying, helpless, prisoner's life — is that what you are so eager for?"

Rama heard her with serious looks, "O, beautiful woman! Where did you learn to talk like this ? Though the king does not have some freedom, he has to bear everything for the sake of governing his people toward peace and prosperity. Don't you know this much?"

Though grief-stricken, Surpanakha laughed carelessly. "Peace and prosperity? Do kings rule people with peace and prosperity? I watch the rule of my brother, and I know how other kings rule their lands. Which king rules for the sake of peace and prosperity of his people? Hardships are inevitable under the rule of any king, aren't they? Who can remove them? Are you so eager for such a rule, my lord?" Surpanakha looked at Rama sadly.

Rama got very angry. "You are a woman. What have you to do with politics? How can you understand the intricacies of politics? Look at my *Dharma patni* (dutiful wife). Does she ever speak like this? If she wants a flower or fruit she asks for it fondly. I bring it to her. She takes care of the cooking and the like. Washes clothes. Cleans the floor of the hut. Washes dishes. When sages come, she stands with respect and talks to them. How obedient! How humble she is! Women should behave like that. It seems there is no such thing in your tribe," said Rama and looked at her remonstratively.

As she could not relish the impatience in Rama's looks, Surpanakha lowered her head.

Rama looked around and was about to remove the bow from the shoulder, but stopped to look up. A cuckoo was singing endlessly from some hidden location. It looked as if a branch were singing. Rama stretched his arms and cried. "Shoo Shoo", in an attempt to scare the cuckoo away. I know your tricks! You are planning to shit on me. Will you get off from there or not? Your Rakshasa tricks won't work on me. Understand? If I keep quiet, some cuckoo-Rakshasa or sparrow-Rakshasa will attack us. Get lost!" he threatened with his arrow and shooed away the cuckoo and a few sparrows from the tree. Then he looked around again suspiciously...focussed his attention on the ants crawling on the leaves — then convinced that they didn't exhibit any characteristic of ant-Rakshasas, hung his bow on a low branch and stretched his body. Though he has removed his bow, it looked like it is still there — there is a white mark on the shoulder where he wore the bow!

Surpanakha took a fresh, careful look at Rama. Those high shoulders, wide chest, wide eyes, and black cheeks — her infatuation for him is growing. She bowed her head down and said humbly, "My lord! Please don't leave this sacred forest life to get into the crooked political life. Please heed my request!"

Rama forgot about his anger, and smiled. "You don't know how anxiously the people of Kosala are waiting for Rama's rule."

"Well, then, those people could have stopped this punishment given to you at the beginning, couldn't they?

"How could they? What about my keeping the word of my father?"

"For the sake of offering a good governance to the people, can't you defy your father's order? You give so much importance to one man's word against the will of thousands of people?"

"Good Lord! *Hari, Hari*!" said Rama and *covered his ears,* to avoid listening to such words. "Has nobody ever told you how sinful it is to disobey your own father?"

"What if you suffer some sin in the act of doing good for your people? Anyway, you don't find any pleasure in the forest life! Commands never give pleasures."

Rama stared at Surpanakha as if he doubted, "Is this a woman?" How could it be otherwise? He could barely turn his gaze away from her without suffering a pain in his heart, like that from a cupid's arrow! That beauty...that youth...that intelligence...why then does she engage in such sinful talk?

A bit frightened by his ominous silence, Surpanakha asked humbly, "Who rules there now that you are away, my lord?"

"My sandals", said Rama, quite proudly.

"Sandals! What does it mean?"

"My shoes. My brother insisted on it, took my shoes, put them on the throne; he sits down on a lower seat and rules the country."

Astonished, Surpanakha said, "What! Sandals ruling the people?" and began to laugh, "Sandals, on the throne…!" She repeated words and broke into peals of laughter.

"Shoes on the throne…!" repeating it and laughing uncontrollably, she leaned on a branch of a tree. Her laughter resounded through out the forest like a swift moving water fall or a river breaching its banks in the rainy season. Birds stopped chirping to listen to her, and wild animals lifted their faces up to look. "Sandals on the throne…!" She continued to laugh.

Rama's eyes became red with anger. But a charming woman! A free woman with no secrets. It is exciting to watch her moving like a wild plant swaying in the wind, and laughing like a fully blossomed *Tangedu* tree! It seems nice when women laugh freely…except Sita, of course!"

Just then he remembered that Sita had asked him to cut *Donda* from the creepers. Well, she would do that herself. Lakshmana might have given her those vegetables.

Observing that Rama was silent, Surpanakha abruptly stopped laughing — but again, unable to control herself, she continued to laugh. "Sri Rama! I am eager to see your city Ayodhya, especially eager to see those people living under the rule of shoes and particularly your brother below the shoes…"

"O, beautiful woman! You talk too much", said Rama, sternly, not knowing what else to say.

Surpanakha lowered her head quickly. The thought that she had hurt the handsome man made her feel a bit ashamed. She stood there silently, lowering her head.

The west was turning red. The sounds of the birds were getting louder. Two water crows flew fluttering over Rama and sprayed him with water droplets.

Rama untied his hair, shook it loose and tried to tie it again in a knot. The unkempt hair troubled him.

"My love, let me tie your hair nicely", saying alluringly, Surpanakha moved a step toward him.

"Stop, O beautiful lady, stop! Stop! Stop!", he cried with alarm.

A startled Surpanakha looked around her, confused. Rama tied his hair into a knot hastily, and swung toward a tree branch, grabbed his bow and slung it on his shoulder. All this time he has been without his bow, it was quite weird as if he was missing his shoulder itself. Then he seemed a bit relaxed.

Looking apprehensively, Surpanakha asked curiously, "My lord! Why do you look so disturbed?"

"Isn't it a great sin to touch a woman who is not mine?" asked Rama, not quite sure himself whether it was a sin or not, turning his face red in an attempt to Rakshasastrate seriousness.

"A woman who is not mine! — who are you talking about? Am I a stranger to you?" Surpanakha was puzzled. "How can I not be your woman even after I have offered myself to you along with my inner soul? My Lord, I am your woman! I am not any other's woman to you. I am husbandless. I have the freedom to offer myself to you. Kindly accept me and make my life complete."

Just as the prayer of a woman who is not his wife makes a man feel proud and happy, Surpanakha's prayer too made Rama feel proud and happy. He looked smilingly at her. "O beautiful woman! You may be without a husband. But I am a married man. I have my wife with me. You see, you are *an outside woman* to me when I have my own woman."

Surpanakha looked at him as if she was sinking into sorrow. A small doubt sprouted in Surpanakha, became bigger and started to bother her. Was this the same man who had appeared in her dream and talked so pleasantly? Was this the lover who had attracted her imagination so much? Was she not mistaken? How come his words are so lifeless and merciless? "My lord! Why do you care about a marriage? You can *accept* any number of women!"

Anxious about something, Rama grabbed a branch near him and kept stripping its green leaves. "It seems you don't know anything about Sri Ramachandra!" he looked with pride.

"Forgive me my lord! Except the sweet memories of my dream, I do not know anything about you."

"Then, listen to me! I am committed to a '*one-wife vow*'(eeka patnii vratam)! I observe that vow!"

"A vow? Does it forbid love for women?"

"Yes, love of women other than the wife is forbidden."

"Alas! Again you are unkind to me! I have never heard about such a vow?"

"You might not have heard of it. You won't find this in any country or any tribe. Even in our country, no man observes it except Sri Ramachandra!"

"Alas! Why have you got entangled in this bond, my lord?"

"Is this bondage? No. This is the path to fame! Entrance to heaven! Marrying only one woman, living with the same woman throughout one's life, is it possible for ordinary people?"

"Love will make it possible. Is your love for your wife so deep, my lord?"

"Whether it is *deep or hidden*! It is a vow! It must be observed!"

Surpanakha looked at Rama with much compassion as if she had seen a giant elephant entangled in chains.

In deep sorrow, with her head bent, and using her fingers to count, "Obeying father's command, banishment to the forest, governance of the people, vow of virtues, and in addition this 'one-wife-vow', oh, no!" she sighed.

"Why do you sigh like that? Won't these things fetch me fame?"

"For whom?"

"For me"

"If they get you fame, why should I be happy, my lord? My brothers don't observe any such vows?"

"Your brothers are *Asuras* (Rakshasas). Your tribe doesn't observe any decent rules and regulations. We are not like that."

"But, you yourself…that your father had many wives…"

"That's different. That's different." Rama turned his gaze toward the river.

"Forgive me lord! It appears to me all this is your illusion. Your father is not committed to a one-wife vow. Has he secured ill-fame? He ruled the kingdom for many years. Gave birth to sons like you. If he were not a pious person, would you have taken birth as his son? When a man who has lived with many wives is a pious man, why this one-wife vow for the sake of such piety? Why are you so unkind to me who is desirous of you, my lord?"

"O beautiful woman! There is no place for kindness here. My vow is like that! How reputed a vow it is!"

"Except my love, I have not understood your worldly behaviour, my lord!"

"But, I don't look at other women."

"Is it because you cannot control yourself?"

"Is self-control impossible for me? I am committed to one-wife vow!"

Surpanakha laughed a bit. "Is this chant that protects you day in and day out?"

"You talk too much", some annoyance showed on Rama's face. "All these years I have been living with my dutiful wife as per the scriptures. She is my *Dharma patni*, dutiful wife! My better half! My…." — Inspired by these words Rama looked toward their hut at a distance.

Spirals of smoke were seen rising over the hut. Looks like Sita has started cooking. She had said she would cook deer meat mixed with *Donda*, the vegetable. Lakshmana might have plucked *Donda* from the creepers. Have the sages, who came in the after noon, woken up now from their naps or not?…Well, he could get there by the time the cooking was done.

Even in that disappointed mood,

Surpanakha was curious to question Rama. "My Lord! Please dispel my doubt! Did you marry Sita Devi, enamoured by her and with a desire to live with her alone?"

"It is not our custom. All the four of our brothers have married as per the elders' wish. I broke the bow, I won Sita by the Rakshasastration of my strength!"

A small ray of ridicule glowed on the face of Surpanakha. "Many valorous persons might have tried to break that bow, mightn't they? It was already an old bow. After every one had bent it, it wasn't such a big deal that you broke it. It was your good luck that it broke in your hands and Sita became your wife"

Rama got so angry as he had never before. — 'Why am I talking to this stupid woman? Sages have been singing praises of my breaking Siva's bow...those compliments...those verses in my praise...those showers of flowers!'

"It was not my fortune, but Sita's. Sita has told me many times that it was her good fortune that I am her husband."

"All wives talk like that, my lord! Intelligent people should not believe such words. Anyway, could you clear a doubt I have? Would not Sita have become the wife of whoever had broken the bow and told him, 'It is my good fortune to have you as my husband', wouldn't she?"

Rama looked around seriously. These kinds of arguments from a woman! Rama looked at the huts amidst the trees in the distance — as if he wondered whether Sita had heard these arguments.

Vines had crept all over the bamboo fences around the huts. Creepers from the vegetable garden had climbed the roofs.

Lakshmana passes his time listlessly in one of the huts. In another hut, big bearded guests come, ask Sita to bake lumps of meat on the fire, eat them, sit in front of Rama and discuss things — like where a certain Sudra was doing penance, where a certain Rakshasa king was offering sacrifices, how to destroy such anti-traditional actions; which great king deserved praise for having won a war with another, which sage had become great with what boon — and then they sing to their heart's content clapping with wooden cymbals, belching and yawning amidst chants of "Ooom", finally falling asleep.

As Rama looked in that direction, he saw Sita removing the clothes spread out to dry on the fence.

Surpanakha has been watching Sita from the distance. 'Sita is a beautiful woman. She has a big hair-do, narrow waist and looks like a sculpted doll. Is it because he has such a beautiful woman as his wife that he had taken a one-wife vow? Alas! Do men see beauty in their wives? It is always the other men who see it. If this man is also like that, would I feel so fervent to offer my love and beauty to him?'

Sita came out again, dipped the pot in the river and carried the water pot to the hut. As she looked at Sita's beautiful form, Surpanakha felt joy as well as sorrow.

"My lord, please listen to my appeal. Please don't be angry. If you permit, I will plead with your wife myself and get her consent. Helping her daily in her chores, I will eventually gain her favour. Please permit me", she looked down, with shyness.

Rama's eyes glowed for a moment. But the next moment, disappointment enveloped him.

"Will any woman like to share her husband with another woman?"

"Wives who are devoted to their husbands like it! For the sake of fame, devoted wives *(pativratas)* sacrifice very easily their husbands and children. I see my brothers' wives tolerating the rival wives for the sake of their husband's pleasure. I know the attitude of many women, don't I?

For a moment, Rama seemed to be immersed in thought, turning his head to the other side. Sita is a great devoted wife. She will be ready even to jump into fire. But his vow?...his fame?

"My Lord, please clarify one more doubt. I am able to see a way out to fulfil my heart's desire. Your one-wife vow will be disturbed only when you marry another woman, won't it? A woman who does not marry you cannot become your wife, can she? I will not let myself disturb your vow. Please let me have your company in the moments that remain after you have spent time with your better half. Please accept my service and love and give me the nectar of your affection.

A tide of thought surged on Rama's face. He looked in wonder. 'Will the relation with a woman other than the wife amount to breach of one-wife vow or not? This doubt had not ever cropped up! How will it amount to breaching? When that woman is not a wife and when a marriage has not taken place? Scriptures won't accept such a woman as a wife, will they? Will it amount to a breach?

Surpanakha bowed her head timidly. The red of the sky was reflecting on her cheeks. Her shadow was undulating on the waves of the water in the river. The waves were flirting with the breeze. The wind was shaking the branches shedding flowers in profusion. With the fallen flowers in her hair and on the silk threads in her garments, Surpanakha looked like a *Tangedu* tree in full bloom.

Troubled by thoughts, brushing the petals off his hair and body, Rama looked disturbed. "O beautiful woman! What do you want of me?"

The entire body of Surpanakha, from top to toe, tingled with excitement. With tears in her eyes, Surpanakha said, "My love! Are you giving me the permission to choose? Your kindness-filled gaze…the feel of your beautiful arms…your sweet embraces! In these forests, on the banks of the river, in the flower gardens — in this nature, uniting with you body and soul, this my relationship with you spanning several births…."

Rama is listening to her entranced. With a smile and half-closed eyes, he looked at her for a long time.

Surpanakha stopped talking and seemed as if she were an accused awaiting judgement.

Rama bowed his head and immersed in deep thought. "With a woman who is not a wife, will it be a violation of the one-wife vow? I, who knew many scriptures, am not able to dispel this doubt, why? What will sages say about this? Will Sita feel sad?…Will Lakshmana be worried?…A woman who is not my wife…whom I have not married as per custom…sages worship me as 'Sri Ramachandra!' They praise my vows…If I violate the vow…will it be a violation of the vow?…A woman who is not my wife…whom I have not married."

This means, Rama, however clever he might have been could not understand his brother, dutiful wife or the great sages.

Lakshmana is not an independent individual capable of finding fault with his brother. It is his vow to exhibit humility and obedience to his brother. The dutiful wife Sita is a great loyal wife. The more she feels sad due to the behaviour of the husband, the more happy she is! What devoted wives wish for is not the love of their husbands but more opportunities to exhibit their devotion to their husbands and further expansion of their fame in the world! If Rama becomes a womanizer, the commitment of Sita Devi to the devotion to her husband will become stronger and will not at all decline.

About sages? Whatever perversion they find in Sri Rama, the sages would eulogize him with new meanings.

But Rama is hesitating with baseless fears and still thinking about it.

The way Rama sat — immersed in deep thought, lowered his head in an angle — extremely attracted Surpanakha. With shyness in the eyes, lustre on her cheeks and fully under the spell of amour, she said, approaching him, "My Love!"

Startled at this, Rama stretched out his hands to block her advance, screaming, "Wait, O beautiful woman! Waitwaitwait!" Then he suddenly pulled his hands back, and blocked her with an arrow, looking seriously at her and trembling.

Surpanakha felt ashamed. She was shocked and bowed her head as if she is insulted. The next moment Surpanakha realized her mistake.

Trying to attract a man when his heart did not desire her…failing to understand the aversion of that man….What a blunder! What a lack of self respect! Alas! How foolish I am!

Looking from top to toe at Surpanakha who appeared despondent, Rama said with a smile, "I declared at the beginning itself that I am committed to one-wife vow, you see!"

Surpanakha raised her head and looked at Rama. "Forgive me! I heard those words from your mouth. But your eyes created many hopes in me. The romantic feelings in your looks…the secret expressions in your actions…created many illusions…you are committed to truth. You are a pious man who does not tell lies. Did you not feel like touching my body, to embrace me?…Did your eyes tell me an untruth?"

Rama hesitated a bit and laughed. "I am not an insensitive fellow who cannot perceive the beauty of women. Your glowing wide eyes…your narrow waist…your big breasts…your…you are a mass of beauty…But you are not my woman! (*para stri*)! I am committed to the one-wife vow! This vow is something which no man practices, you know!"

Vow! Vow! Fame! Fame! Surpanakha laughed with disappointment. "Sri Rama! Don't worry! I will not let the lustre of your fame be spoiled due to me. I understand your inner thoughts. It is enough for me. I take leave." She stood for a moment and left from there. Without looking back, she walked about ten feet with disappointment.

For river Godavari — the place where Surpanakha stood until then looked forlorn…entire forest empty…nature lifeless…the beauty of winter waned! As Surpanakha's shadow moved over the waves, the disheartened waves followed her shadow silently.

"O beautiful woman! You can go, of course, but wait!" Rama said in a serene voice from behind Surpanakha.

Surpanakha stopped and looked back with surprise.

Rama's mind has been struggling with various thoughts, the moment he came to know who she was…She was Ravana's sister…Rakshasa woman…should I let her go so easily?…"O beautiful woman! You need not feel disappointed. You have seen only me not my brother Lakshmana. He has come to the forests along with me, leaving his wife behind. He has been without the conjugal pleasure for so many years. What does it matter whether it is the elder brother or the younger brother? Make Lakshmana happy with your beauty", saying so, Rama smiled at Surpanakha with a side-ward glance.

Surpanakha looked in dismay. She stared at Rama as if she had been insulted. "Rama! I desired you; did I desire you brother? Why do you insult a woman so much?"

"Does pleasing Lakshmana amount to an insult? No. If you see him, you will be enamoured of him. Lakhsmana! Come here!"

Lakshmana lowered his head, back and the body and leant on the bow. He was trembling before his elder brother. In no time, he again stretched his folded hands and saluted his brother. "Yes, brother sir! What is your command?" said he and stood ready to carry out his orders.

Lakshmana's behaviour caused Surpanakha an aversion. She looked at him strangely.

Looking at Surpanakha with a side glance, Rama said, "You have seen my brother. He is not like every body else. He doesn't even breathe without my command. You might have heard the sages sing praises that there are no brothers in this world like Rama and Lakshmana."

Tickled by the words of his brother, Lakshmana saluted him again and asked trembling, "You are kind! What is your command?" He prayed to him again.

The behaviour of these brothers is quite amusing to Surpanakha. None of her brothers is bound by the others' command. Each one has his own independent life. If differences arise in political strategies, they engage in serious arguments and debates.

These brothers are amusing! Even in her disappointed mood, she looked at Rama laughing sarcastically. "Doesn't your brother have any vow restrictions?"

"Why not?" Rama looked with pride. "Carrying the orders of the brother is his vow! Service to the brother is his duty! That is why, he came along with me even abandoning his wife."

"Is his wife not a loyal wife?"

"Why not? She is a great devoted wife!"

"Why didn't she accompany her husband to the forests?"

"O beautiful woman! Don't talk too much!" Rama looked harshly. "Pray to him for alms of love! Your desire will be fulfilled."

Surpanakha looked shocked. She turned her face away from Rama angrily.

Looking at the feet of his brother, Lakshmana hung his head and stood very close to the ground.

Even in such a disappointed mood and anger, that scene appeared amusing to Surpanakha. She felt encouraged to make fun of Lakshmana.

"Lakshmana! I thought of you differently before I saw you. Now, I realized the truth. You alone were the man in my dreams. I was born only for you. My heart is deeply set on you. Please be merciful and give me alms of love." She looked at him playfully.

Rama stood with a sarcastic laugh, as if he was watching the fun.

Saluting his brother, Lakshmana bowed much further toward the ground and said, "Brother sir! What is your order? Do you order me to give alms of love to her or not?"

Pretending to be angry, Surpanakha said, "My love! Is this something you ask others about? Your handsome personality is making me delirious. Let us become one and wander around the whole forest. I will make you a free man with my love, at least! Come, my love! My heart is impatient to kiss you." Saying so, she stepped toward Lakshmana.

Trembling, Lakshmana asked, "My brother sir! What is your order? Shall I give her a kiss or not?" and looked at the feet of his brother.

Surpanakha smiled in ridicule. "You coward! Why this slavery? Even the lowest of the lowest insects aspire for freedom! Even the speechless birds and animals cry freely. The wind blows freely. Nature evolves freely. So many chains for humans? Didn't your souls ever writhe in these shackles? Didn't your bodies ever struggle for freedom?" The smiling looks in Rama's eyes disappeared. His eyes reddened with anger.

"Lakshmana! Have you heard her words?"

Lakshmana became furious and in that emotion he raised his back. "O brother sir! Who is this stupid woman? How dare she argue with you! Just order me! I will slay her into pieces." He learned on the bow and shook with anger.

Surpanakha looked fearlessly. "You fool! You slay your ignorance! Kill your slavery! Destroy the hypocrisy of your vows which makes you say one thing and do another. Cut your desire for fame! What is the purpose of your lifeless and useless zombie births? What good are your empty passive souls? Are you ideal men, who insult other's woman? What is your message to the human world? Your existence is contrary to the laws of nature, distortions of nature's beauty. Your histories are blots on the human record…."

Lakshmana jumped at Surpanakha and grabbed her hair. With rising fury and boundless anger, he said, "Brother sir! It is not good to delay it any further. Just give me your order!" He waited for his brother's order.

Rama looked at Surpanakha with harsh looks. This is Ravana's sister! A woman of the enemy tribe! She has so much beauty! But this is a base woman who drags ideal men into sex and disturb their vows!…To this immoral woman…this woman who does not have humility and obedience for elders…why beauty to her…If obeying father's command is not *punya* (piety), if living in the forest is not a punishment, if one-wife vow is not a virtue, is it then completely useless that I put up all these sufferings for so long, for so many years? Are all these efforts in vain? What does she know to be so arrogant?

Hatred toward the woman of the hostile tribe…anger that rose against her freedom…his hypocrisy exposed in her arguments....every thing increased the harshness in Rama ten fold.

The sun has disappeared rapidly in the west. In that twilight Rama looked ferociously with his reddened dark face. "Lakshamana! This is Ravana's sister! A woman belonging to the hostile tribe. It is not necessary to ignore this woman out of mercy. Go ahead! Don't delay! Destroy this woman's beauty and make it useless to every man. She deserves this punishment", said Rama, with a look that derives pleasure in killing and laughed cruelly.

Surpanakha struggled with all her might from Lakshmana's grip. "You wicked fellow! Leave me! Leave me!"

Lakshmana, who has been following his elder brother like a shadow and did not learn to oppose any humiliation...Lakshmana who imbibed all the insults as a matter of vow and whose soul did not learn to respond what should be protected and what should be punished...such a Lakshmana pulled and held Surpanakha tightly with the strength of his fanaticism.The leathery, boneless hands of Lakshmana, like snorting snakes, are grabbing her at one place as she writhed out of the grip at another. Surpanakha became exhausted and helpless.

With cruelty, Lakhshmana held Surpanakha tight. "You base woman! Suffer the consequences of your sinful behaviour!" Saying so, he cut off her nose and ears, thus committing a heinous crime worse than a murder.[155]

Enjoying great pleasure from the sight of torture inflicted on the woman belonging to an enemy tribe, Rama stood serenely. "I'll see, what her brother will do!"

The Sun — perhaps he must have anticipated the actions of Sri Ramachandra — had disappeared a long time back. Behind the sun, the sun light too gradually faded out. Darkness enveloped the entire forest. Birds accommodated themselves in the nests. Animals put their heads down and lay quietly behind bushes. The river stopped making a noise. All nature wore silence.

In all that tranquillity Surpanakha stood there with streams of blood and with eyes infuriated with anger. "Sri Ramachandra! You have committed an act that excels all your ideal vows! You have exhibited your power and ability — which sages praise — on a helpless woman. My physical deformity is no match to your mental deformity! Even without my ears and nose, I can still experience the pleasant sounds of the forest and its fragrance. Disfiguring me like this, you have revealed your ugly frightening real nature. This is the reward I have got in return for my infatuation for you. If you ever gain fame and reputation in this world — all people will read your history on my face. The legend of Sri Ramachandra! On the face of Surpanakaha...!" Surpanakha stopped speaking. She turned around and walked quickly into the darkness...into the woods....

From a distance, from the direction of the huts, the enthusiastic voices of the sages — after their dinner — eulogizing Rama are heard, "O Rama! Kausalya is blessed with a worthy son in you......" ★

[Translation: Text - **Ari Sitaramayya**]
Foot Notes: B.R.Bapuji

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[155] **Aranya kanda, sarga 18, slokas 20, 21:** "Lakshmana! You ought not joke with cruel and wicked people. Mutilate this ugly, vile, highly wanton and big bellied woman' since she attempted to harm Sita. Drawing his sword, when spoken to in these words, the angry Lakshmana, who was possessed of great might, lopped off her ears and nose while Sri Ramachandra looked on." When they were young, these two brothers had killed Tataki and cut the nose and ears off her dead body. Now, they tortured Surpanakha and left her without killing her — because she has to go and report all this to her brother. In the view of devotees of Rama, these heinous acts of Rama and Lakshmana are valorous and pious! ★

Link-3

Between the 3rd Story and the 4th Story

[The **3rd** story ends with the cutting off of the nose and ears of Surpanakha by Lakshmana at the orders of Rama. The **4th** story begins with Surpanakha going to Ravana. This link represents that part which connects stories 3 and 4.]

Surpanakha, with streams of blood on her entire body, went to Khara, who was in the nearby locality.[156]

As soon as he saw Surpanakha, Khara was shocked. "What is this horrible thing? Which vile fellow did this to you?" he roared.

Surpanakha narrated every thing: her infatuation for Rama, her request to him to marry her, the brothers ridiculing her and cruelly mutilating her nose and ears.[157]

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[156] We will find Surpanakha's past in **Uttara kanda. sarga 23, slokas 18,19; sarga 24, slokas 35 to 44:** Khara is the son of Surpanakha's mother's younger sister. In the past, Ravana had conquered many territories and kept Khara, with some army, as his royal representative at a place called *Janasthan* in *Dandakaranya*. Ravana, in a war he had waged in the past, had intentionally killed Vidyujihwa, husband of Surpanakha. Later, when Surpanakha was grieving, Ravana had consoled her that he would take care of her without any dearth for anything and had asked her to live in Janasthan. Since then Surpanakha had been living in Janasthan. Khara had been looking after her with affection. Surpanakha was destroyed by both Ravana and Rama. Ravana had killed her husband; Rama had had her limbs severed. ★

[157] **Aranya kanda, sarga 19, slokas 14 to 16; sarga 34, sloka 11:** Whatever she reported to Khara, Surpanakha said it praising Rama and Lakshmana. "Richly endowed with comeliness…having large lotus-like eyes…self-controlled, practising austerities and continence, there are two brothers, Rama and Lakshmana. I was spared, after disgracing me, by the high-souled Rama, who hesitated to kill a woman." Ravana, even while he is angry at Rama, also says, "I will kill that great man!" This is the poet's talent of portraying a character. The poet does not at all pay attention to things like 'how a character ought to speak and when one should praise or abuse his enemy. The poet may have devotion for Rama. Even his readers may have it. But, enemies have hatred and will be zealous to abuse, slay and kill Rama. The poet ought to show things like that.

Another point: According to Valmiki, Surpanakha did not tell either Khara or Ravana that she had asked Rama to marry her. But, while the battle was taking place between Rama and Ravana and when people fighting on behalf of Ravana were being killed, women in Lanka lamented thus, "Alas! Why should Surpanakha at all have had infatuation for Rama? Why did she create all these difficulties for us?" (**Yuddha kanda, sarga 95, slokas 7 to 9**). It is clear from this that all people in Lanka knew that Surpanakha had asked Rama to marry her. I, therefore, have written here that Surpanakha had narrated everything to her brothers without concealing any thing from them. ★

Khara, with uncontrollable anger, called 14 warriors and ordered, "We should not tolerate the insult inflicted on Surpanakha. Go and kill those wicked fellows."

Those soldiers went on war against Rama. Rama took the bow tipped with gold (*Bow tipped with gold, for a sage!*) and stood in front of the Rakshasas. "Have you come despite knowing who we are? We are sons of great king Dasaratha! We are self-controlled, practising austerities and continence, living on fruits and roots. Have you come to harass innocent people like us?"

"You have caused anger to our king Khara. How can we go back without killing you?" said Rakshasa warriors.

"In fact I have come to the forest with weapons in order to kill you and protect the sages. Run away if you have desire to live," said Rama.

The Rakshasa warriors remembered the king's order and began to fight.

The battle took place for some time.

Rama won (*due to the generosity of the poet*). Rama killed all those warriors with his arrows with tips of gold.

Learning about it, Surpanakha with uncontrollable anger said to Khara, "You yourself go and kill that vile fellow! Otherwise, how can you protect this Janasthan from the enemies?

Khara started off with 14 thousand soldiers.

On his way, Khara was confronted with many bad omens. Red water showered down from the clouds. An eagle came down and sat on the chariot of Khara. All the beasts howled in fright. All the lotus in the lake dried up. Fruits and flowers of the trees on the path along which his soldiers passed disappeared. (*Soldiers must have eaten all the fruits and plucked the flowers.*) **[158]**

Gods and sages gathered in crowds in the airplanes in sky and began to talk, "Rama should win this war. All these Rakshasas must perish. Brahmins and cows must be safe."

In the place where Rama stayed, birds cooed sweetly. The wind was blowing coolly. Rama said to Lakshmana, "Lakshamana! Have you seen the abnormal signs at a distance… good omens here? These omens indicate that all the Rakshasas will perish and we will win the battle. There is no doubt about it. You take Sita at once into the cave in the midst of those trees and protect her. I, myself, will kill all these enemies. Don't question me! My feet command you!" Rama hurried Lakshmana.[159]

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158. In religious literature, it is a custom to describe some good or bad omens depending on the nature of the scene. As it was a period when humans had not acquired scientific knowledge concerning nature, people in the feudal society believed in omens every moment. In literature, the poet depicts good omens in the case of the characters that he defends and bad omens in the case of characters that he opposes. On certain occasions, he describes a good omen if the future action might yield a good result and a bad omen if it will yield a bad result. ★

159. Aranya kanda, sarga 24, sloka 13: It would have been alright, had Rama said, "I am ordering you!" Instead, he says, "My feet are ordering you!" Rama's feet are worthy of worship even for Rama himself. Rama thinks, "Aha! These are the feet of Sri Ramachandra!" Self-praise like this is like saluting one's own feet! ★

Lakshmana, accompanied by Sita, went into a cave and was guarding the entrance. Rama wore a shield, tied his sword to his waist and was ready to use his bow. (*Aha! Sage!*)

Khara's army sprang into action. A fierce battle began. Although fourteen thousand Rakshasas surrounded him from all sides and dumped swords, large axes, wheels, iron cabbed heavy clubs and pestles on Rama, he felled them very easily. Moreover, he slew the entire Rakshasa army — cutting into pieces their horses and warriors on the horses, elephants and the warriors on their backs, the elephant drivers, chariots, the commanders and the chariot drivers — breaking their shoulders, thighs, backs, waists, necks and heads into pieces and fought the battle.

He threw a hundred arrows on a group of hundred enemies, a thousand arrows on a group of thousand and five thousand arrows on a group of five thousand and killed them. (*That is, first he counts the number of enemies and then counts the arrows...!*)

Gods and the best among Brahmins watched the battle with great joy from the sky. (*It would be nice if the Rakshasas had thrown a couple of swords up into the sky!*)

Rama was fighting with a sword in one hand and throwing arrows with the other! (*Don't believe, dirty lies!*)

Those who survived in the Rakshasa army fled away to their king (Khara) crying, "Save us! Save us!"

The chief commander of Khara's army is Dushana. He spoke encouraging words and sent them to fight again.**[160]**

The soldiers with freshly gained enthusiasm surrounded Rama from all sides and attacked him throwing their weapons at him. Rama smilingly threw a weapon called *Gandhavyastra*, a weapon which *Gandharvas* use. (*Rama has many spells and strategies which all the sages had given him. He has so many quivers that they don't become empty even if he takes out any number of arrows. Well, the Rakshasas don't have those things!*) Many soldiers are killed. The rest of them lost their freshly gained spirit and fled away fearing for their life.

This time, Khara was incensed. (*This time, no good words, but threats!*) With anger, he gathered every one and entered the battlefield.

After a while, commanders and the soldiers of Khara lost their lives. Only Khara and his General named Trisira remained. (*Ravana had a son called Trisira. But, that Trisira and this Trisira are different.*)

Trisira said to Khara, "O king! Why do you fight when I am here?" and he fought with Rama and he too followed the same path which the others had. (*Loyalty to the king should be like that!*)

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160. Aranya kanda, sarga 25, slokas 29 to 31: See — fleeing away of soldiers, good words of the commander, soldiers springing into battle again with enthusiasm! Good words mean charging their emotions: "We have to be really courageous at this moment. The king will give rewards to those who fight well. Even if you lay down your life in this battle, you will get martyrdom. Come on, move! Victory or martyrdom!" Though the methods of war change according to the times, this is what they always teach the soldiers.

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Now only Khara remained. Though he hesitated for a while, he jumped into the battle. Soon, he lost his chariot, chariot driver, weapons and stood on the battle ground.

Rama said with pride, "By the king's order I came down here to kill vile and base fellows like you who torture great sages and innocent people. You will also follow the path of your army." Saying so, he began to fight using the *Vaishnava* bow which sage Agasthya had given him. [161]

Khara routed a big tree and fought with it. Rama destroyed that tree into small pieces. "Now, you are finished. All your wives are now deprived of pleasures. When you die, all the Brahmins will be safe." Saying so, he showered arrows on him again.

Khara also died. (*When the poet, gods and the best of the Brahmins are on the side of Rama, can Rama die?*)

All those in the sky were overwhelmed with joy showered a rain of flowers eulogizing Rama. They played on heavenly drums. "Rama! Once Indra had come to Sarabhanga's hermitage to discuss with the sages plans for killing these Rakshasas. We called you to this place with an intention to make you do this job. Bravo! You have done a great job!" [162]

Sita came out of the cave and felt very happy for there was no danger to her husband (*Because it was others' husbands who had faced that danger! For devoted wives, let others die in thousands, their husbands alone must stay safe!*)

A spy called Akampana went to Ravana and informed him about the battle in Janasthan. (*Talking about Rama, Akampana praises Rama thus, "That great man of meditation...killed Khara." Moreover, Akampana describes the beauty of Sita and advises Ravana to kidnap Sita. Akampana had not at all seen Sita. Sita was in the cave, wasn't she?*)

Then, Ravana approached Maricha immediately. He sought his help to kidnap Sita. Maricha praised Rama and scolded Ravana. Ravana had heard of Rama's valour, lost heart and went back.

Then Surpanakha went to Ravana. When Surpanakha told every thing, he listened to her as if he had heard about Rama for the first time. On the whole, there is some confusion here!

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[Translation: **B. R. Bapuji**]

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[161] **Aranya kanda, sarga 29, sloka 10:** Rama says he is on the mission to establish *'dharma'* (justice) in the world by the orders of Bharata, the king. This he tells more clearly before Vali. Whereas Bharata, on the other hand, says that Rama is the king and he rules the kingdom as Rama's representative. Here, this gentleman says he is acting as per Bharata's instructions. Rama's sword is double edged!

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[162] **Aranya kanda, sarga 30, slokas 30, 31:** Rama came to this place only to fight against Rakshasas. It is only because of Surpanakha's visit, that this battle began, isn't it? This means, Rama made use of Surpanakha's visit as a pretext while he was waiting for the battle with the Rakshasas.

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Story-4

Greater Guy than the Other!

Every atom of the body and soul of Surpanakha is eager to wreak vengeance. Now, she knows very clearly. Rama is an enemy of her tribe. The sage attire is only a deceptive one.

After forgetting her husband...after so long a time...now again...infatuation for a man has made her crazy with ecstasy as if it were a novel experience. Irrepressible love from her heart, like moonlight, showered on that vile fellow. The next moment what a tragedy! Thinking about the infatuation for Rama is now making her body shrink in shame. Her soul is trembling with grief.

That wicked man has made an indelible wound not simply on her body but on the self-respect of her tribe. The death of her brother, she was so fond of ...total destruction in *Janasthana*...All this because of her stupidity. Because she had failed to identify the enemy.

Has her brother in the city of Lanka come to know about this news? Is he fulminating with hatred? He is not an ignoramus to ignore an enemy. If he thinks he would gain a kingdom, money or woman, every king will make his friends too as enemies. Then, will her brother let this pass? He is as cruel as he is heroic! So lustful of women! He had accomplished victories in many battles! Will he spare this Rama without taking revenge?

Surpanakha felt a bit relieved on thinking about her brother.

Even before the arrival of Surpanakha, Ravana had heard about all that had taken place in *Janasthana* through his spies. He was fuming against the enemy.

He consoled the wailing Surpanakha and said, "Tell me everything in detail. Why do you lose heart when I am here to take revenge?" He twirled his moustache.

Surpanakha recounted all that she had told Khara. "Elder brother! You told me to live safely in Janasthana. Your enemy has occupied the entire area."

Ravana heard all that and observed silence for some time. "Now the thing I have to do is to kill that enemy. That's alright! I have heard that the wife of Rama is very beautiful. Is it true? Have you seen her?" He asked eagerly.

Surpanakha saw sternly. "You do not realise what calamity will occur because of this lust for women. If you are so lustful and wallow in pleasure and luxury, people will not respect you for long."

Ravana laughed in a carefree manner. "Does a king rule for the sake of gaining his people's respect and according to their wishes? Do the people respect if the king rules according to the dictates of some? A king who maintains an army and a treasury in plenty need not fear anything. Whatever the king commands is right. A king who is not paramount will equate himself with the commoners. Ravana will never face such a fate...By the by, why don't you tell me about Sita? Is she so enchanting?" he asked again eagerly.

"Yes, very beautiful. But, I have heard that she is deeply devoted to her husband."

"Deeply devoted to her husband? Then I must get her without fail!"

"Brother! Without killing Rama, it is not possible for any one to touch *even* her *toe nail*!"

Ravana laughed as if it was not necessary to heed Surpanakha's words. "Is that man such a great hero?" Again he twirled his moustache.

On seeing her brother's attitude, Surpanakha felt that his aim was totally on Sita. "You do not seem to be in a hurry to wreak vengeance on Rama" said she and looked at him with dismay.

"I am thinking of a suitable plan for that."

"Plan? Are you still thinking of a plan instead of waging a battle to kill Rama? A king who does not accomplish things hastening to the situation will forego his kingdom and become worthless *like a blade of grass*, they say. A blade of grass, dust and rubble too might be of use, but a king losing his kingdom will come to nothing however great a hero and efficient he might be, they say. Knowing fully the damage Rama has done to you and the humiliation he has caused your sister, are you still thinking of a plan? Are you faltering to fight and kill him?"[163]

"Don't be hasty! You yourself say that he is a hero."

"Are you not a hero who excels him? Brother, my heart burns for revenge against Rama. Go at once and kill that vile man."

"Don't be hasty. I shall make Rama one equal to a dead man, alright?"

"No, that wicked fellow must die."

"Right, leave that to me. Don't worry!"

"I stop worrying only when you tell me that you have killed Rama and his brother."

"O dear innocent sister! You seem to doubt my valour! See how the whole of my body is shaped with scars and bumps, because of many battles and fights! See how hard these hands have become by the perfect show of strength!" Ravana showed his palms, thighs and shoulders, which were like rocks.

"Then, why do you work out plans instead of fighting with Rama heroically?"

"You innocent girl! Plans are also part of the fight. Do you think war is clashing with swords alone? Any act that deceives the enemy is also battle?" Ravana was immersed in thought.

Surpanakha looked at him displeased and went away from her elder brother's room.

★ ★ ★

In the *Dandakaranya*, amidst thick groves, two men sat discussing politics, in a remote cottage. One of them was the Lord of Lanka, Ravana. The other one was his kin, Maricha. Maricha listened to Ravana's words, obediently with folded hands.

Ravana is shaking with anger. "How dare he occupy Janasthana! Knowing fully well that Surpanakha is my sister, he has mutilated her for no reason and he is provoking me for a fight with arrogance implying that he is a great hero. It is said that he boasts that the gods created him only to kill Ravana! It seems that Rama is not aware that I have made all the gods my attendants. My heart is burning with indignation. I shall not rest without insulting my enemy. I shall abduct his wife. Even if all my brothers and relatives stand against me, I shall not budge to anybody. You have to help me in this task...." Ravana paused.

Maricha shivered uncontrollably. Partly, as he was afraid of Ravana and partly afraid of Rama! "How can a misfortunate one like me help a king like you?" he prostrated at the feet of Ravana.

"I have heard that Sita is fond of birds and animals. You have to appear before Sita in the guise of a golden deer. Sita will try to catch hold of you. You should not come into her hold. Then Rama will follow you to catch hold of you. You have to drag Rama away to a long distance in to the forest. Then you should create a delusion that he is in great danger. You should cry aloud, "Lakshmana! Sita! Save me!" Then Lakshmana will also leave that place going in search of Rama. Sita will be alone. Then I shall at once lift her and place her on my chariot." [164]

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163. Aranya kanda, sarga 33, slokas 17 to 19: Surpanakha cautions Ravana. A king's power does not lie in his individual heroism and individual ability. It is in the 'wealth' called 'kingdom'. It lies in the 'power' that comes from his position. This is the essence of the matter. ★

164. Aranya kanda, sarga 36, slokas 18, 19: We have to convert the myth that Maricha turned into a deer into reality. I have, however, retained certain of these myths. If we convert this into reality, it means Maricha helped Ravana in some way to abduct Sita. ★

Maricha turned pale. Then picking up his courage, he began sermonizing but shivering. "Your Excellency! I am your relative. I am your well wisher. Somebody told you about Rama to create hatred in you for Rama. What do you think of Rama? He is the incarnation of goddess of justice! A great ascetic! Just as Indra is the king of the gods, so is Rama fit to become the king of the entire world. Will you abduct the wife of such a great man? Do you want to give rise to enmity with Rama? Who gave you this idea? Have you carefully thought about this in consultation with Vibhishana and other friends? Heed my advice and give up this attempt."

This Maricha is no other than the son of Tataki, who fell victim to the intrigues of the sages and died! Not having any grouse that Rama had killed his mother, he now lauds Rama and becomes servile to Rama.

Unable to bear Maricha's eulogy, Ravana with blazing eyes, furiously said, "Base fellow! How dare you eulogize my enemy?" Ravana drew out his sword.

Trembling in obeisance, Maricha said, "Your Excellency! Pardon me! Please calm down! For me none is greater than you. As I have witnessed Rama's valour with my own eyes, I submitted the intricacies to you. I am simply hesitating because of Rama's heroism. When Rama came as a young lad to protect Viswamitra's sacrifice, he killed my mother and Subahu with arrows. I could some how escape and save my skin. Even after Rama came to Dandakaranya, I took two friends with me and went to fight against him due to the old vengeance. Then also I could not stand up against his valour and saved my life by escaping from there. The two who came along with me gave up their life. From then on, casting off my enmity with Rama, I live a saint's life, serving the sages. People who have tasted Rama's valour will never go to attack him again. Wherever I look, I find the arrows of Rama. Always, even in my dream, I see Rama's ferociousness." So saying he looked around.

Ravana again ablaze with anger. "You fool! You have not stopped praising my enemy. Since you have become a coward you have given up all heroic deeds. If Rama is such a great hero, why would he shamelessly follow a woman's word and come to the forests giving up his kingdom?" Ravana laughed derisively.[165]

Maricha gathered some courage. "Rama came to the forests to uphold his father's commitment to truth, not as one who was incompetent! Heed my advice, great king! Don't have enmity with Rama. Live happily safeguarding your kingdom and life. Though I know that these words are not pleasing to you…in your best interests…"

Ravana became infuriated, "Enough of it! Stop your sermonizing! I must abduct Sita. If I make up my mind once, even Indra cannot change it. I have not sought your advice whether my plan is good or bad. It may be right if you had advised me had I asked you. Even if what you say is good or safe for me, a king with honour will never act according to others' decisions. What do you think of a king? The king possesses all the energy, ability and brightness of all the gods such as Yama, Agni, Indra, Chandra and Varuna. That is why a king has to be worshipped and respected. When a king himself comes and asks you to do a job…you fool! You are preaching me morals, recounting my good and bad qualities. I cannot tolerate this impudence. Come on, start at once", so he roared.[166]

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[165] **Aranya kanda, sarga 40, sloka 5:** Ravana is deriding Rama's coming to the forests at the vord of a woman as unmanly. Ravana also had a poor view of women, as Rama had. Obeying one's ather's command or another man's order was not objectionable to either. The entire humiliation vas studded in following a woman's word. ★

[166] **Aranya kanda, sarga 40, sloka 12:** Ravana also holds the idea that a king has the qualities of a god, as Rama does. This is a propaganda which preaches people that a king is great, to be vorshipped and not to be defied and this makes the people obedient to the king in their minds oluntarily. Any king of any country does the same. ★

Maricha fell at the feet of Ravana, "O king! If you want me to survive in this remote place, don't ask me to do this job. Show mercy on me! Leave me alone!.....me...."

"No, even if you don't like it, I shall see how you don't do this job. He who has not done good for his king has never been happy. I don't know when you will die if you quarrel with Rama but you will die now itself if you quarrel with me. I will return to Lanka only after killing you. If you carry out this task well, I shall offer you half of my kingdom. I shall take you to Lanka in my chariot. Think of it. You preached to me what is good and what is bad. Now think for yourself what is good for you," Ravana saw ferociously.[167]

Maricha did not believe a word of Ravana. As for the offer of half of the kingdom he did not believe it at all. All the belief was on the slash of the sword of Ravana. He stood up and folded his hands.

"O king, it is a matter of pleasure for me even if I lose my life in the service of the king", he said and bowed his head.

Ravana was pleased and praised Maricha, "Now you are brave Maricha. You are not a coward!"

"Who else is more cowardly than you? If you are a warrior, why don't you fight with Rama?", cried Maricha within himself.

★ ★ ★

Sita was plucking flowers, wandering amid the plants, in front of the cottage. While her bangles and anklets were jingling, birds on the trees at a distance were looking at Sita.

On hearing a sound of running among the banana trees, she saw a deer prancing there raising its small tail. It lowered its mouth to eat the green grass and the next moment it jumped to another spot. It looked bewildered at the new plants, new flowers and new house with frightened eyes. It jumped amid the plants and bit the tender leaves. When some noise was heard in the cottage, she went up to the mud pial and ran back. When Sita stopped plucking flowers and looked at the deer with a smiling face, the deer also stood at a distance and looked at Sita without moving as if it asked, "So, you are Sita?"

When Sita was about to make two steps forward thinking that it was standing still, it ran a distance of twenty yards and stood there as if saying, "Now, catch me! I will not run, any more, you see!"

Sita felt charmed on seeing the deer. Its feet, neck, eyes, body and all were in harmony. Every day, here and there at a distance, beautiful deer and antelopes came into sight, but this one seemed to have strayed away from its herd. Taking initiative, if she tried to catch it, it seemed it might come into her grip.

Sita slowly moved forward with a smiling face. "Come on! Come on! Won't you come? Come here, you have to! Why are you frightened? Come here! How nice your eyes are! Let me see, more closely...will you stay with me?...Oh! You are going away, aren't you? All right, I shall run along with you and see I shall catch you! I shall tie you to a *Parijata* tree and not let you free. You are biting all the tender leaves of the plants and spoiling them, aren't you?" saying so, she ran toward the deer.

The deer, as if teasing Sita, jumped about on the grass. Smiling and running behind the deer, Sita spilt all the flowers, which she had collected in her upper garment.

Sita laughing at intervals shouted, "Lakshmana! What are you doing? Come quickly! See who has come to our hermitage! Also, call your brother quickly! Come quickly! This thief is evasive."

On hearing the laughter and shouts of Sita, Rama came out frowning and adjusting his bow. The deer, which was jumping till then evading

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167. Aranya kanda, sarga 40, slokas 23, 25: Ravana offered Maricha half of the kingdom. He said he would kill him if he did not do the job he had asked. Will he give a half of the kingdom to a servant? From this we can understand how kings get their things done being so vile, tyrannical and by making false promises.

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Sita, ran at a stretch in the distant trees on seeing Rama's bow.

On seeing her husband, Sita ceased running and laughing and shyly approached him slowly as if she had made a mistake.

"All the while it jumped here. It ran away frightened on seeing you. There! See it stands under the *Chuta* (Mango) tree. Oh! How beautiful! It might have strayed away from some sage's hermitage! I think it may be a domesticated deer. It might have lost its way. Lakshmana, do you see it?" she pointed in that direction.

Looking in that direction, Lakshmana said, "If the fence gate were closed, it would have remained here, sister-in-law."

"Alas! That idea did not strike me", Sita felt repentant.

Rama did not show any enthusiasm about the deer.

As if coaxing Rama, Sita said, "How cute, chiselled and charming it is! The horns are like sapphires! The belly is white like Jasmine. The hooves are tender and crimson like diamonds. How slender the knees are! They bend like bows. The red spots shine brightly like gems on that copper coloured hide! The back slides smooth like a *Madhuka* flower. Eyes are the size of lotuses! There is a white spot on the forehead, as though the colour has faded because some one kissed it there. The neck is a bit long! While it had jumped in the sun, the eyes dazzled with brightness as though the sun's rays had fallen on a diamond. Lakshmana! You haven't seen it, our house was beautified when it was prancing here!" Describing the beauty and attraction of the deer with jubilation, Sita was telling one word to Rama and another to Lakshmana.

Both of them looked at a distance. The deer was resting in the shade of the trees. They did not find any of the features that Sita enumerated. Lakshmana, who was working at something at the trunk of a banana tree said, "It may have appeared to you like that because you saw it in the sun once, sister-in-law!"

"No! Not once, I saw it many a time. That is why I called you to come quickly. How beautiful it is!"

"If it is so beautiful, it must be a contrivance of the Rakshasas. For that matter, Rakshasas in the guise of deer drag kings who come for hunting to distant areas and kill them, sister-in-law!" **168**

Sita got annoyed with Lakshmana. "What is that talk, Lakshmana? Don't we see beautiful flowers, birds and animals? Even among humans don't we find beautiful people with neatly chiselled eyes and nose? In the same way, it may have been born of good parentage", so saying she looked at Rama, laughing.

"All right, what of Lakshmana's words, if you have seen it, you will not dismiss my word. If that deer is in our cottage…nicely with that always…playing…", she halted.

"Well, you want to still play like a kid, do you?" Rama laughed.

Sita felt shy. "Not for my sake. For its sake. It has to be playful. When our exile period is over we can take it along with us to Ayodhya. We shall keep it in our garden. Everybody will see it. Mothers-in-law, Bharata and everybody will appreciate it saying, "How beautiful! How beautiful! Where did you get it from?" Sita paused for a while and asked Rama hesitantly, "Can't you fetch it?" **169**

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168. Aranya kanda, sarga 43, sloka 4: Lakshmana says, "Maricha himself came in the guise of a deer." But Rama does not know that. It is surprising that a 'half god' does not know the thing which 'half-quarter and half' god knows! ★

169. Aranya kanda, sarga 43, slokas 9, 15, 16:

"I shall play with that deer. We can take it to Ayodhya" says Sita. "Bharata will also appreciate it", she said. They remember Bharata for everything since he is the royal representative and is in high position. None mentions Satrughna any where. ★

Why can't I? It is enough if I release one arrow aimed at it", said he and looked at the deer under the trees.

That deer looked as if it had a fresh doubt, "Haven't seen sages taking up a bow anywhere!"

Sita unwilling said, "Alas! Will you injure so beautiful a creature? If you gently hold it and get it..." she paused with a doubt: "Can it be got?"

Hesitant that she was causing inconvenience to her husband, "I know that loyal wives should not ask their husbands for some thing or other, but...." She bowed her head in hesitation.[170]

A wife's awe and reverence, obedience and humility greatly pleased Sri Rama. By fulfilling the desire of the wife, one can look at her solemnly when she feels happy...But what sort of desire is this? If she had asked for some flower or nut, one could have got it without effort. But what is this asking for a running deer, holding gently? Can an animal be caught if it disappears like lightning? If I say so, she may even say, "Can't a great hero like you catch a deer?" She has, however, learnt the art of putting questions well but shouldn't a devoted wife learn the propriety of what to ask and what not to ask?

Frowning a little, Rama said, "Sita! Is catching hold of a deer an easy thing? In a flash it disappears. Can it be caught alive?"

Sita mused.

It seemed her desire displeased her husband. It was clear that he could not catch it alive. If she asked, "Get the deer without shooting it with an arrow. Otherwise I do not want it" and if the deer escapes? A situation might develop when her husband might feel disgraced. If she said, "be it so, I do not want that deer"? Then it might suggest a different meaning. "All the while I was eager for it, exultant for it but now I am giving up my desire because you can not get it." So, it is neither possible to give up her desire nor to ask to get the deer without injuring it. In fact, it is a fault on the part of loyal women to make such requests to their husbands. Then is not wishing for impracticable things much more so? She should never do such a thing. She should request her husband to get in whatever way he can. Then a situation when he cannot fulfil her desire will never arise, will it?

Pointing out the deer with great desire, Sita said "See it has come into the sun. Look, how bright its hide is shining! All my longing is for its hide. If it cannot be caught alive, it is enough...if you get its hide. It will be very nice if we put it on *dharmasanam*, an elevated seat and sit on it. Sages visiting our hermitage every day will appreciate it", she said smiling.[171]

Lakshmana looked at Sita with amazement. Many a time, Sita's attitude was beyond comprehension to Lakshmana in many aspects.

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170. Aranya kanda, sarga 43, sloka 20:

Wives devoted to their husbands *(pati vratas)* should not ask their husbands for any thing! This is a moral which husbands alone preached. How shameless these husbands are! This is like saying, "Look here! If you ask me for anything, you are bad. If you don't, you are good!" That which does not cause inconvenience to the husbands is a great merit. ★

171. Aranya kanda, sarga 43, slokas 18, 19: She is asking for the hide as if all her life depended on it. If she is fond of deer hide, then why did she fancy playing with it and taking it to Ayodhya? Does not Sri Ramachandra have the capacity of catching a deer alive? What has happened to all the chants, over powering allurement weapons, *Brahmastras* (supreme weapons) which he had learnt from childhood? Why did Sita, who had asked for the deer in the beginning, have now asked for the hide? Sensing that her husband cannot get the deer alive, she changed her desire with a view not to embarrass her husband. Husbands swagger as great competent men, because wives suppress their desires without openly expressing them! ★

However tenderly she behaved in one moment, she behaved very harshly in another.

Sita has changed a lot during this period of ten to twelve years. The tenderness of her heart has vanished to a large extent. However glad she may be seeing birds and animals, she is not feeling sad even when they died before her eyes. Apart from that, Sita feels astonished at her own greatness as the sages visiting them daily praised her for her services, thus: "You are a great loyal wife! You are unequalled!" She kept saying daily on one occasion or the other thus, "I am not like ordinary women!"

Sita would sit or lie down at the feet of Rama whether he sat or lay. She would sigh, "If I depart in this manner with my eyes closed at your feet, it will be enough for this birth." If Sita went to sleep forgetfully without saying these words, Rama could not sleep comfortably. He would feel so agitated as he felt when he had been dethroned, till Sita uttered those words. That was why, Rama's mind did not revert to the task of getting the deer, till Sita exhibited humility saying, "I know that virtuous woman should not ask husband for anything....But...."

Rama was afraid that Sita would ask him to get that deer alive. But when she said, "All my mind is on that hide", Rama felt overwhelming. Killing birds and animals by shooting arrows...what dearth of enthusiasm and heroism would be there? Moreover, Rama had got used to forest life. "Lakshmana! Now it is clearly visible! See, fat thighs and all that it is beautiful. Where can it go without being caught? Even if it is Rakshasa-delusion, it has to be killed", said he taking up the sword. All right, I shall be off. Don't go anywhere. Some sages may come, Sita will be alone", so saying he walked on behind the bushes crossing the threshold, unseen by the deer.[172]

Sita stood for some time on the pial, waited for some time and then went in.

Lakshmana, setting right the pits at the trunks of the plantain trees, began to set flowers in order, as they bent due to the wind.

Feeling agitated, Sita approached Lakshmana. "Lakshmana! Didn't you hear the voice of your brother?...Oh! You are still here!" she worried.

Lakshmana said obediently, "keep cool, sister-in-law! Keep cool! Why do you fear so much?" Then he got up from his work.

Turning pale and shedding tears, Sita said, "Some danger may have befallen your brother in the forest! He made distressed cry, "Sita! Lakshmana! Save me, save me! Didn't you hear it? Alas! What may have happened?...My spirits are agitated."

Lakshmana, being unmoved, tried to convince her, "Keep cool! Sister-in-law! Kindly listen to what I say. Some enemies might have cried distressfully to frighten us. Will any danger ever befall Sri Ramachandra? Do not you know that he is a great hero? Why do you get so panicky?"

For a moment Lakshmana's words seemed convincing to Sita. But even then her fear did not abate. "Alas! He may really be in danger, Lakshmana!....He cried distressfully, "Save me Sita! Lakshmana!" She looked baffled.

Lakshmana said fearlessly, "You are under a delusion, sister-in-law! Will a great hero like Sri Ramachandra, a man born in Ikshvaku dynasty — even if he were trapped in a great danger — ask a woman thus, "Sita! Save me!" Even

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172. For Rama, who finds good or bad omens every now and then, there was no omen when he set out for this deceitful deer. Why? Because if they had appeared, should they not have been ill omens? If it had happened that way, Rama should not have gone out, should he? Then the story will not proceed, will it? So the esteemed poet avoided describing omens here. But, while Rama was returning all omens appeared. (Because, by then, the abduction of Sita was over.) When do, in fact, omens appear? Prior to an action or later?

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from this, don't you feel it is not my brother who cried so? Believe me sister-in-law! All this is a delusion created by the Rakshasas. Enemy conspiracies have increased around us since the battle with Khara." [173]

"That is why, I am so alarmed, Lakshmana! We don't know what trouble those enemies are causing your brother! You have to go and see! Go at once!"

"Be brave! Brother Sir will return shortly to the cottage safely, after tearing those wicked fellows to pieces. There is nothing to worry about. Can enemies conquer Rama, whom even the gods dare not look with *eyes wide open?"*

"Lakshamana! Your carelessness is annoying me. When I ask you to go and find out what danger has befallen your brother...You don't move even your feet! You have poured out affection on your brother all these days...but when he is in danger, you don't have even an iota of worry, to save him! Wicked man! While my heart is so troubled for the safety of my husband, you do not have any anxiety for your brother. I did not realize all this time that you are such a wicked person. You base fellow! As you are unable to oppose my husband bravely, you wait for the time when the enemies can finish that great man. You have thus conspired to subdue me with your charms in some way and hence you accompanied us here. This is a conspiracy, which you and Bharata have hatched! Now, all this is very clear to me", saying so, Sita was under the grip of the spirit of 'devoted wives'. [174]

Lakshmana was struck dumb on hearing the words of Sita. By the time he realized their meaning, he was furious. Exhibiting humility with great difficulty he prayed, "Sister-in-law! Please keep cool! I felt it my duty to abide by my brother's command. I have no doubt at all about the valour of my brother. Don't be angry with me for saying so! You are like god to me. It is not just for you to utter such a harsh an accusation. Believe me that no danger will befall Sri Ramachandra."

Under the possession of the obsession for the value of devotion to husband, Sita is still swinging in anger.

"Pooh! Knave! End this beguilement!" she roared. "Vile man! I have never set eyes on any other man than my husband. I won't survive without my husband even for a moment..." Sita said blazing with anger.

In her inner soul, on the one hand, Sita plunged into bewilderment at the words that gushed out from her thus, "Is it me who is scolding Lakshmana with these words?" On the other

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173. Aranya kanda, sarga 59, sloka 11: "Will Rama, who protects even the gods, ever do a thing, which is never done by one born in a great family, of asking a woman to save him?" says Lakshmana. Then Rama, who protects the gods, should not call Lakshmana also crying out 'Lakshmana! Save me!', should he? If Lakshmana says, 'Will Rama ask even me to protect him', we may conclude all that is Rama's greatness. But what Lakshmana says is, 'Will a man ask a woman to save him!' It is a man who has to protect the woman always!

Here the affair of a 'great family' also is present. If it is a man from an ordinary family (that is one, not a royal family), he may ask a woman to protect him, by a slip of the tongue! A man from a high family should never do such a thing! ★

174. Aranya kanda, sarga 45, slokas 24, 25: Sita is abusing Lakshmana and Bharata. In fact, ten years earlier, Rama had assigned to Lakshmana the duty of getting a flower or a nut or anything else which Sita asked for. Since then, Lakshmana had been attending to all those things. Lakshmana alone had been doing many things. Then why did Lakshmana not go for that deer? What would have happened, if Lakshmana had gone instead of Rama? ★

hand, she felt eager, "I am a great devoted wife! I shall show this blockhead what power my devotion to my husband has!"

The malady of Sita's 'devotion to her husband' has been transformed into the ailment of arrogance at some time. It was an ailment of arrogance that all the other men desired her. Strange thoughts that Lakshmana, Bharata, Satrughna — all are conspiring to spoil her conjugal fidelity to her husband! Sita was always avid that other men should desire her and she must make clear to the public her conjugal fidelity to her husband by rejecting other men desiring her. Because of this avidity, *suspicion* began on Lakshmana without cause and the next moment *it grew to the size of a mountain.*

In response to Lakshmana's prayer, Sita became more furious. "You can never beguile me with these deceitful words. Never did you have any reverence for your brother. When danger befalls my husband I shall end my life jumping into the Godavary. I shall sacrifice my life by consuming poison or hanging my self or jumping into the fire or jumping from the top of a mountain but never shall I touch another man even with my foot" so saying she *covered the hem of the upper garment around her shoulders* (as a mark of chastity.) [175]

Sita's words are unbearable to Lakshamana. He is unable to believe his own ears. With that disbelief, he was terribly angry at his sister-in-law. "I know how base women's nature is. Women don't have humility and obedience. They are utterly fickle minded. They always behave harshly. They utter wicked words without understanding the propriety in any matter and this is usual to them. Women will never rest till they cause a rift between brothers or their kith and kin if they are in good terms." Lakshmana abused all women on behalf of men in the entire world. He said, "I am going" and took his bow and went out crossing the fence, with big strides.[176]

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Sita — who sat bewildered as if she has not understood what had happened — stood up faltering and wiping her eyes on seeing a great sage entering the premises of the cottage, reciting the *Upanishad* maxims.

"Be pleased to come, respected sage! Be pleased to come!", she bent low and saluted the feet of the sage. She rushed inside, brought water for him to wash his feet and gave it to the sage with reverence. She spread the soft seat of sacrificial grass and asked, "Respected sage!

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[175] **Aranya kanda, sarga 45, slokas 36, 37:** Sita was saying how she would die in the absence of Rama. See later, how long Sita lived without her husband after she said, "I will not live even for a moment without my lord" ★

[176] **Aranya kanda, sarga 45, slokas 28, 29:** The poet skilfully describes how base, stupid, low and villainous women are and what terrible deeds they do. It is only to attack women that Sita was made to utter so many words. It is to make men folk feel, "Yes! What, then, is this rebuking of Lakshmana"? In the past, Rama also had abused Lakshmana many a time. "You are trying to kill Bharata"; "You are prattling like a base fellow!" He said many things many times. Then this esteemed poet did not make Lakshmana say a single word against Rama. Did the poet write even once that Lakshmana had made a comment, "You talk without knowing what is good and bad. You suspect me even when I do so much drudgery!" No, he did not. Now he could have kept silent at the words of sister-in-law also. No, he did not do so. She is a woman, isn't it? Women are wicked, aren't they? That is why the poet made Lakshmana curse women.

That Lakshmana drew lines in front of the house, that he asked Sita not to cross those lines — these things are not found in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. ★

Please take rest on this seat!" She placed before him on a plantain leaf all kinds of fruits, ready in the house. "Take them, respected sage! The food is also ready. My husband has gone out for hunting. He will get wild boar meat and the meat of iguana", said she and stood before the sage bowing her head in humility.[177]

Ravana has been staring at Sita since he arrived. Her beauty appeared to him some thing very special. Observing Sita from top to toe, he looked at her with a smile. "Lass! You are alone in this vast forest. Who are you? What is your husband's name? You are glittering like a goddess of beauty. You are so delicate! Your teeth are like jasmine…broad eyes…thin waist… gold-like body complexion… I have not seen a woman like you anywhere! Who are you? *Bhudevi* — Goddess of earth? *Sridevi* — Goddess of wealth? *Rati Devi* — Goddess of beauty? What is your name?" he initiated the conversation.[178]

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177. Aranya kanda, sarga 46, sloka 2: Ravana came in the garb of a sage. Rama also is playing politics in the garb of a sage. This means, the attire of a sage alone is the best suited attire either to deceive or to conduct affairs secretly! This practice of fake sages has been a part of our great tradition!

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178. Aranya kanda, sarga 46, slokas 17 to 22: I cannot but write here how Ravana describes the body parts of Sita — because we have to discuss this point. After describing teeth, eyes and cheeks, he continued: "Beauty! You shine like the goddess Lakshmi. Your buttocks are high like sand dunes. Your lower belly is wide and high. Your waist fits in a fist. Your thighs are like the trunks of a fatty elephant. Your breasts are round, high and with big nipples, rubbing each other and swing heavily like Palmyra fruits. Your breasts, covered with fine hair, shake enchantingly and attract my mind immensely…." — This description stopped with this much in this scene. It is not Ravana who beholds Sita in this disrobed fashion, it is the esteemed poet himself. Poets — while calling devoted wives every minute, 'Goddess Lakshmi", "Goddess Parvati" — penetrate through their gem necklaces, silk garments, embroidered jackets, with X-ray eyes, seeing their breasts, shoulders, lower bellies, thighs, waists and buttocks and describe them attractively and narrate the same to all and please them. So this is what they call '*a poet sees what the sun cannot!*'

One cannot argue that since Ravana was lustful, the poet had described Sita in this manner. The readers do not know that there are such descriptions from the beginning of the story, since I have left out such descriptions from these stories. It may be Lakshmana, Hanuman or even sages who talked to Sita, the form of address would invariably be: 'O woman with good buttocks!' *(Susroni!)*; 'O woman with good waist! *(Sumadhye!)*.

Since this epic is written in verses, for the sake of suitability of prosody and filling in the gaps in the peg of the verse — if words like '*Sundari!*' ('O beauty!'), '*Manini!*' ('O honorable!'), '*Sukesini!*' ('O woman with good hair!') are used — depending upon the context and the relationship between the characters — we can understand the point to some extent. But if Lakshmana describes Sita's thighs and Hanuman her waist — we need not hesitate to call the poet names! (We can call him with any name!)

"Your thighs are fat! Your buttocks are fat! Your breasts are fat!" — Always this is the kind of poetry! The body parts of women should be fat. While *smacking their tongues against the palate*, making imaginary flights around the body parts of women in such forms of poetry as *Kavyas* and *Prabandhas*, the poets and scholars prate outwardly, "that great devoted wife!", "that goddess Lakshmi!." Moreover, they gave it a fake name '*sringar*' (romance)! These feudal poets grow fat like street pigs and write this 'fat poetry'. This is the characteristic of feudal culture. This culture ordains women to be dependent on men and serve them by way of sex and drudgery. Hence, feudal culture depicts women as devoted wives, objects of enjoyment and slaves engaged in

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Sita felt somewhat bashful. Any sage who came there would say on seeing her, "You are like goddess Lakshmi, my girl! You are like goddess Parvati, my girl! What are these travails for an embodiment of beauty like you? What is this forest exile for a virtuous woman like you?" Thus it was usual to praise her beauty and feel sorry for her misfortune.

On hearing the praise of this sage as usual, and leaning against the door, Sita stood in humility. "I am the daughter-in-law of king Dasaratha, respected sage! I am the wife of Sri Ramachandra. I am called Sita. My father-in-law did not give his kingdom to my husband on the word of his last wife. Moreover, he imposed 14 years exile to the forest on my husband. Unable to live in comforts and luxury without my husband, I have come along with him to live in the forests, respected sage! My brother-in-law also has come with us", so saying she looked anxiously at the trees outside. "My husband offers what others desire but never receives anything from them, respected sage! He always utters the truth…never a lie." So saying, she again looked outside. "Have the fruits to your fill, respected sage! We have not seen you before. My husband and brother-in-law will be extremely pleased to see you, respected sage! You have not revealed your name…family…*gotra* (clan mark), respected sage!" Sita stood talking respectfully.

Ravana was in a hurry to finish the work for which he had come. He looked at Sita seriously and poured out smiles and said, "O beautiful woman! Your beauty is extremely enticing to me. A delicate woman like you must saunter in cities and gardens. You must enjoy the comforts and riches there." Ravana stood up from the grass seat and again said with a smile, "O beautiful woman! Have you ever heard of the Lord of Lanka, Ravana? I am that Ravana! I am the one who has conquered all the gods! I have heard about your beauty earlier. Enchanted with that, I have come in this guise to take you along with me. I have abducted many beautiful women and made them my wives. But on seeing you I have lost my fondness for all of them. I shall take you as my dearest wife. Come away with me at once." Ravana walked toward Sita.

When Sita heard Ravana's words, she was thunder struck. She could at once comprehend the real danger even in that astonishment. She realized that, in the absence of her husband and when she was alone, a stranger is desirous of her, who is a great devoted wife!

She went behind the door trembling with fear raging with anger. "You wicked fellow! You have come in the guise of a sage and received my hospitality. How can you talk in such a vile manner with a woman who is alone? Who do

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→ drudgery. But it depicts men as heroes, capable and brave people. Though it describes their physical features a little, it describes their qualities, abilities and strength to a great extent.

Even in bourgeois (capitalist) society, a woman does not have a respectable status. The capitalist society, whose sole aim is commodity production, exhibits the bodies of women and makes use of them as means of advertising for selling its commodities. That is why there is no scope to depict women characters in bourgeois literature as characters with self-respect and individuality.

When an awareness to detest feudal and bourgeois culture is attained, no attention should be paid to the body parts of men and women. Women should not be viewed as sex objects. One should recognize her individuality based on her views and way of thinking.

When a man says, "You are so beautiful. Your eyes…your cheeks…your waist…your gait…" and so on, women should not feel exultant. A woman should feel insulted when a man recognizes only her body parts and physical features. When a boy says to a girl, "You are very beautiful", she should realise that he is looking at her from the sex-point of view and give him a big slap on his cheek. If the sandal is used, it is better still! ★

you think Sri Ramachandra is? A great hero! Supreme man! Equal to Lord Indra! Being the wife of such a hero, can any other man dare want and get me? Know that enmity with my husband is evidently enmity with Yama, the god of death." Sita's eyes blazed with fury and tried to frighten Ravana even though she was trembling with fear.

A few moments ago when she was rebuking Lakshmana, who was trembling with humility, she had not derived any satisfaction that she was rejecting a man. But now, at this moment, on hearing the desire of a ferocious outsider, she rejected him and stood shivering and agitated out of real fear.

Laughing recklessly, Ravana said, "You are describing the heroism of your husband. Now listen to my heroism as well! On hearing my name, all the enemies scatter away like birds seeing an arrow. Kubera himself gave up Lanka for me and fled away to Kailasa. I fought with him and won the aircraft '*Pushpak*'. What do you know of my valour? When I walk under the trees, the leaves don't move in fear. When I walk beside a river, waters do not flow. Even the sun and moon serve me slavishly. If you visit Lanka once, you will never think of your husband and relatives. Dasaratha gave the kingdom to his darling son and exiled your husband to the forests. What pleasures will you enjoy with a man who has lost his kingdom? You should think it is your fortune that I desire you. It is not wise to reject me. O beautiful woman! Your husband *cannot equal even my little finger*! Don't delay! Start at once!" With lustful looks, Ravana was about to embrace Sita.

Shivering with fear and getting angry while remembering the power of her virtuousness and charged with emotion, Sita said, "You base fellow! Stop your prating. Indra may not do anything even if you desire his wife but my husband will not let you live if you desire me…." Sita stepped back a little.

Ravana looked defiantly. "You have not yet grasped the extent of my heroism. I shall lift the earth on my shoulder. I shall suck the oceans. I shall kill even the goddess of death. I shall stop even the journey of the Sun. Even if you search all the worlds, you will find only me as a suitable husband", so saying he put his arms around Sita and held her tightly.[179]

Sita howled in fear. She did not have even an iota of faith in Ravana's heroism. It was her belief that heroism of any body was *equal to a blade of grass*, compared to the heroism of her husband. But, all of a sudden she could not but believe the violence of this stranger. Sita wriggled to get free from him with fear and spite.

With ferocious determination, Ravana caught hold of Sita's locks, kept his right hand under her thighs and lifted her like a young deer. Kicking away the grass seats and articles of worship that were on the passage and walking in strides, Ravana went toward the chariot, stationed behind the trees.[180]

Realising the situation, Sita howled in fear, "Alas! Alas! Save me! Save me!"

On seating himself in the chariot, Ravana sat Sita on his thigh. The chariot moved on. Sita wriggled to jump out of the chariot, crying without stop like one maddened.

Such a great devoted wife, who ought to have burnt to ashes any man other than her husband as soon as he touched her, unable to escape from the demonic grip of a stranger, is crying helplessly, "Save me, save me! Alas! Is there none to save me?"

Some birds, which were familiar with Sita, flew to some distance along with her, landed on trees and looked confused. ★

[Translation: **R. Venkateswara Rao**]

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179. Aranya kanda, sarga 49, slokas 3, 4:

Ravana described his own heroism. Every character in the story indulges in self-praise. All the heroism is only in words. When it comes to the actuality, we find no ability in any of them to do the job. It is a feudal mentality to boast, "I am so great, I am very great!" ★

180. Aranya kanda, sarga 49, sloka 17: See how Ravana carried away Sita. ★

Link-4

Between the 4th Story and the 5th Story

[The **4th** story ended with Ravana sitting Sita on the chariot and starting off. The **5th** story begins with Rama bewailing for Sita as per tradition. This is the link between the two stories.]

The chariot of mules is traversing the sky path.

Ravana dragged Sita forcibly on to his thigh, sat embracing her, without any chance for her to free herself.

Crying and abusing Ravana, Sita shouted, "Rama! Lakshmana! This wicked man is abducting me! Alas! How will you know that Ravana has abducted me? When will this wicked man perish? Has not the time come yet? The wish of that wicked woman Kaika is fulfilled. Now she will be secure and happy." She looked around crying.[181]

"Hey, *Karnika* tree! You have to tell my husband that Ravana has abducted me", Sita said. Looking at the *Prasravana* Mountain, she saluted with folded hands and said, "O Prasravana! Tell Rama about this evil news, father!" Seeing Godavari, she said, "Mother Godavari! At least you tell my husband that this vile fellow has abducted me! (*Does it mean that the mountain nit-wit will any way never inform Rama?*) Sita remembered all the wood goddesses. "O wood goddesses! At least you should tell him about this!" (*This time suspicion on Godavari also!*) Sita looked around in fear. (*May be with a feeling whether these would really inform!*) "Oh, birds! I am dearer than life to my husband. If my husband comes to know of it, he will over power this base man and save me even though Ravana places me in heaven or hell.[182]

Bemoaning in this manner, Sita with good buttocks *(Susroni)* saw Jatayu asleep on a tree at a distance (*She might have seen with her buttocks, it appears. To see some one at a distance good buttocks are required, it seems! It would be another thing if the poet had described, 'Sita with good eyes'*)[183]

"Oh, Jatayu bird! This wicked Ravana is carrying me away. Even if you pity me, there is no use. It is not possible for you to intercept him. This base fellow has all sorts of weapons with him. Tell my husband this much", she cried. (*Sita says, 'you can not release me! It is not possible for you!' It seems, Sita fears that Jatayu may release her! May be She is comfortable on the thigh of Ravana!*)[184]

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181. Aranya kanda, sarga 49, slokas 27, 28:

Sita is moaning, "A wicked man does not receive the result of his wicked action immediately. Time has to come." Here there is scope for a question, 'Rama's divinity and Sita's virtuousness are not of any use?' Hence the argument: 'A time should come for the ruin of a wicked person. That is why the wicked act of Ravana will not receive punishment immediately.' ★

182. Aranya kanda, sarga 49, slokas 34, 35: 'I am dearer than life to my husband' says Sita. Rama had said many a time without hesitation how Sita is inferior to many others. Sita is oblivious of all that. Every thing is an illusion, pretension and self deception among these characters. ★

183. Aranya kanda, sarga 49, slokas 38:

'Sita with good buttocks saw Jatayu and said grieving.' ★

184. Aranya kanda, sarga 49, sloka 40: This is to say before hand that Jatayu does not have weapons and hence he will face defeat fighting Ravana. ★

Jatayu woke up with a jerk on hearing the shouts of Sita. He saw what was going on in the chariot. He shook his wings in anger, stretched his neck upto the chariot from the tree. "Ravana! Who do you think this Sita, whom you are carrying, is? She is the wife of Sri Ramachandra, the lord of all the worlds. Rama does good for all the worlds. I am Jatayu. I have been serving Sri Rama as a duty of servile code that has come down to me from ages.[185] Can I keep silent when harm is being done to Sri Rama? A man should protect the wives of others as he saves his own wife. Could good men enjoy pleasures of *Dharma* (duty), *Artha* (riches) and *Kama* (desire) that are not mentioned in the codes of scriptures? A king should mainly protect royal women, shouldn't he? You are also a king, aren't you?[186]

Has Sri Rama done anything unjust in your case or in the case of your kingdom? Was it not Khara who came to battle first, goaded by Surpanakha. Rama killed the enemy who had intruded, what wrong was there? Leave Sita at once. Otherwise, it will be like tying a great serpent round your neck! I am now 60 thousand years old. May be it is true that I am old, but do not think that I will allow you to go safely. Shall I let you carry away Sita? You will face the same fate as Khara. Come! I shall feast you with a battle", so saying Jatayu jumped on Ravana flying from the tree.

Ravana with weapons! Jatayu with nails! A fierce battle ensued between the two.

Jatayu broke the bow of Ravana with his legs. Ravana, took up another bow from the chariot, shot arrows around Jatayu, as if he were building a nest.

Jatayu dispersed all those arrows with his wings and broke that bow also. Pulling with his nails, he removed Ravana's armour also. He killed the mules also.

Jatayu killed the umbrella carriers standing behind Ravana and the people fanning him. Killing the chariot driver, he threw him out. Pulling off the wheels of the chariot he broke the chariot (*Poor Ravana! What a shame before Sita! Jatayu is doing things very crudely, isn't he?*)[187]

When the chariot was broken, Ravana fell down with Sita in his lap. (*It benefited Sita a lot to sit on the thighs of Ravana! Otherwise what severe injuries would have befallen her!*)

When Ravana fell down, all the living creatures applauded the king of birds, "Well done! Well done!"

Ravana sensed that Jatayu was tired. He flew into the sky lifting Sita courageously. He sat squatting on the air and placing Sita again in his lap, continued his journey flying. (*How nice it would be to fly like that! Sita, sit in his*

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[185] **Aranya kanda, sarga 50, sloka 3:** Jatayu says, "I am in the duty of traditional servile code." Duty of servility! That too traditional! What is that traditional duty of servitude? That belongs to the system of slavery — this is the point one has to understand. We can infer the past history from such expressions in the religious stories. ★

[186] **Aranya kanda, sarga 50, slokas 6 to 8:** Why does a man protect his wife? It is because of the threat of other men. If all men desist from doing any harm to other women, there will be no need at all to protect their wives, in the first place. It is said that a king should protect other women, chiefly "royal women". It does not matter much if others are not protected. All those women belong to lower castes, don't they? Thus, these morals are full of contradictions in every aspect. ★

[187] **Aranya kanda, sarga 51, sloka 18:** Even in the chariot, a king has an umbrella carrier and fanning! These attendants seem to be utter stupid, other wise should they not take to their heels throwing away the umbrellas and fans, jumping off the chariot? Servants do not act like that. Fanning, fanning, fanning — and in that fanning (service) alone, they die for the sake of the king. The intention here is to say that servants should perform their duty in that manner! ★

lap only! Even if you fall....can't say!)

Jatayu angrily pursued him. "You wicked! Ravana! Stop there, stand there! (*Unfold the squatting posture!*) Who do you think Sri Ramachandra is? He is of the *Kakutsa* dynasty. If you are a hero, fight with me and then go!" so crying Jatayu flew behind Ravana and sat on Ravana's back with a thud. (*Ugh! Too rough!*)

Like a mahout, hitting a defiant elephant with an elephant-goad, Jatayu tore Ravana's back piercing it with his beak. (*It seems Jatayu is about to finish Ravana, leaving nothing to Rama to kill! Are you not afraid that the story will finish here itself?*)

Jatayu tried to pluck the hair on the ten heads of Ravana (*It may be all right if the chariot is broken, it may be all right if the back is torn — but will it look nice if the hair are dishevelled? Wouldn't it irritate terribly? Moreover Sita is there by his side!*)

Ravana got infuriated by then (*for making the hair dishevelled! Yes, haven't I said so!*), turned back to fight with Jatayu. (*Jatayu was there on his back*).

Ravana, holding Sita pressed under his left shoulder ten hands, started fighting with Jatayu on his back with his right hands.

Jatayu, pricked the left shoulder of Ravana with his beak again and again and removed all the ten arms like a bunch. (*Alas! Alas! Sita is under that shoulder! What have you done Jatayu?*) The moment the bunch of arms fell off, ten more arms came there springing like hissing snakes from a snake pit. (*If it goes in this manner, who can fight? One should die in a battle soon. If all the limbs cut off so spring up again, won't the other fellow feel disgraced and helpless?*)

Seeing it futile to go on like that, Ravana placed Sita down and began fighting with Jatayu with his legs and hands. He cut off Jatayu's wings and feet with a sword. Jatayu fell to the ground.

Sita came running, embraced Jatayu and wept. "Alas! This king of birds who came to defend me, is destroyed. Rama! Don't you know about this yet? Haven't you found any ill omens? Has not your left eye quivered? Have not the birds cried hoarsely?" so saying, Sita with her moon like face and Sita with her brightly shining body *(Subhangi)* wept a great deal.

After Jatayu's fall, Ravana came again to Sita. Sita ran to the big trees, and embraced them firmly.

Ravana pulled Sita holding her hair saying, "Leave off! Leave off!

Darkness enveloped all the worlds. The wind stopped. The sunlight abated.

Brahma saw with his divine eye *(divya dristhi)*. He perceived the real situation. He felt glad that Ravana was abducting Sita — now Ravana's death was near.

All the sages in *Dandakaranya* felt happy that Ravana was abducting Sita.[188]

Ravana flew again into the sky, taking hold of Sita under his arm, while Sita was wailing, "Rama! Lakshmana! Save me! Save me!" He is passing through like an arrow.

Sita looked down, if Rama or Lakshmana would come into sight.

The anklets, bangles and gold necklaces of Sita made ringing sounds. While Ravana was flying with those sounds, it was as if the clouds were roaring and floating.

The flower garland broke off from Sita's neck and the fragrant red flower petals, slid down Ravana's shoulder like a flowery rain. (*She adorned herself with many flowers!*)

The anklet bells on Sita's left foot broke off and fell down jingling. Still, some more ornaments fell down like stars falling from the sky. (*How many ornaments she wore!*)

The gem necklace on Sita's breast broke off (*Can't the poet say, 'the shining gem necklace around Sita's neck'? The poet's attention does not stray from the buttocks and breasts of*

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188. Aranya kanda, sarga 52, sloka 13, 14:

"All the sages in Dandakaranya felt happy that Ravana's doom had come." All the great sages might have gone behind the bushes shivering. Actually, all the sages knew that Ravana was carrying away Sita, by her cries. All of them were Rama's neighbours. ★

'the great mother Sita', why is this so?) and shone like the Ganges descending down from heaven.

Sita, with her golden complexion is glittering brilliantly like lightning in the clouds.

Sita's *face with nice nose*, sagged with sorrow. (*Good relief! Sita's nose is nice. Worried all the while about how Sita's nose looks like!*)

Sita's hair is fine, with curls and rings at the tips. Sita's lips are pink, teeth are white and face is like the day time moon with lessened brightness.

The dark hand of Ravana, circling around the waist of Sita, which shone with brightness like a gold girdle studded with sapphires. (*What, then, is the problem? It would be nice if Rama's hand circled the waist of Sita for ever!*)[189]

The trees below are waving their heads in the wind, appeared to tell Sita, "Don't fear, Sita!"

Sita is still looking for Rama below.

Lions and tigers in the forest ran after the shadow of Ravana underneath with anger. (*Sita might have seen lions at least now!*)

All the mountains with waterfalls seemed to weep for Sita.

All the elements of nature gathered in the sky and sorrowed over Sita saying, "Alas! Ravana is abducting Sita! Where is the righteousness in this world? Where is the truth?"

Siddhas and *Charanas* (*pure and holy people, panegyrists of the gods*) said to themselves happily, "Now Ravana's life is finished."

All the forest goddesses are taking to their heels in whatever position they are.

Sita's hair is completely tangled. Her vermilion mark is scattered. "Ravana! Wicked fellow! Shameless fellow! You are abducting me with deceitful tricks! If you go fast what can even my husband do? If you halt a while, you will come to know of my husband's valour. You do not know the heat of the arrows of Rama and Lakshmana. Your doom is approaching. You will embrace a hot, burning iron pillar in the world of Yama", so abusing him, she saw *'Vanaras'* (Apes) on a mountain underneath. Tearing a piece of cloth from her garment, removing some ornaments, made a bundle and dropped it. — Rama might come to know of this (abduction) if he came in search of her. (*Apart from those which have fallen, from those which were bundled, there are many ornaments on her body still!*)

Ravana dashed through like an arrow, crossed the sea, and entered Lanka. Flying on the king's way, (*king's ways for those who fly! Instead of flying over the houses, he was flying along the road. Utterly foolish flying!*), flying the door ways brought Sita at last to his harem and put her down. (*Thank god! He brought her safely without dropping her some where. It was enough if Sita were alive in some place or the other!*)

Ravana summoned some female servants. "Without my permission none of the women or men, should be allowed to see Sita. Do you understand? Whatever she asks for, may it be gold ornaments or silk clothes, gems, pearls or anything, give it to her at once. If any one utters a word that is not to her liking, it will be death to them." He made a menacing sound and went out of the harem.

Summoning 8 soldiers, he told them, "Go at once to *Janasthana* with arms! The enmity between Rama and me has commenced now. You have to convey information about Rama to me regularly. (*How easy it would be! Arrivals and departures are only by flying, any way!*) Rama is my enemy. Every moment, you should

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189. Aranya kanda, sarga 52, slokas 25: "Sita, attached to Ravana's limbs, shone like a golden girdle studded with sapphires" — so, that is the matter! 'Ravana's hand circling round Sita's waist' against her will — what sort of a thing is this? It is a matter that her body should boil with hatred. Even for onlookers it appears so abhorrent. The description should be, 'Sita shivered in fear as if a black cobra had gripped round her waist' or some other thing. But what is this 'shining' description? This means, when men molest women, it appears pleasing and nice to our esteemed poet! If Sita shines beautifully because she is attached to Ravana's limbs, the sheen should continue to be so, shouldn't it? For Sita, Rama's hand is one sapphire studded girdle; Ravana's hand is another sapphire studded girdle! Will any one question, "Why there should be two girdles for Sita?' Why only two? There is nothing wrong in any number of girdles, is it?★

attempt to kill Rama. (*What are these killings, sir? Every one has to kill his enemy himself! If some one else kills somebody's enemies, how will the story be good?*)[190]

Ravana praised the soldiers, "You are great warriors. I know about your valour from many battles. That is why I am sending you to Janasthana. Don't fear! Be brave! You can show your valour", so he praised them. (*So, he* ***puffed*** *them up! Heroes have this puffing up besides flying and jumping!*)

The warriors left, puffed up. Ravana went again to Sita and laughed. Sita is weeping.

Ravana, took the weeping Sita with him, went round his chambers to exhibit his wealth and riches. (*Why did Sita accompany him? Yes, would Ravana leave her if she had declined? Again he would place girdle round her waist and take her, any way!*)

Thousands of women were there in the harems. (*All of them have been abducted in this fashion!*) All the harems glittering brilliantly with silver pillars, golden thresholds and steps. The whole compound is full with big aircrafts, small aircrafts and they had windows made of gold. (*Having so many aircrafts, will any body board a chariot of mules, unless he is a mad fellow?*) The entire floor is paved with the powder of pearls and gems. (*How will it be nice? Won't the soles of the feet hurt while walking?*)

In the gardens, there are lakes every where. (*Oh, only this much? Sita saw many such lakes in the forests!*)

Ravana looked with pride. "So you have seen my treasures and luxuries? I am the lord of 32 crore Rakshasa race. I can employ thousands of heroes for any task. None can overpower me. Then what of Rama? In fact, how can Rama come here? (*This is true. One should call a spade a spade! Can Rama fly and do all that?*) None can take you away from here. — Your buttocks are fat — what sin you have committed, I don't know! You have spent years in exile. Now enjoy these pleasures! — Your thighs are fat. — I have the aircraft *Pushpaka* with me. We shall go round merrily in that. Youth is transitory, you know. Enjoy lustful pleasures with me. All this kingdom is at my command. I am at your command. If you reject me, I will not survive, you know?" he said. (*He might have said these words to thousands of women. He knew them by rote*!)[191]

Sita, shedding tears without stop, covered her face with the the upper garment. "Sita! So you feel shy of receiving an outsider, leaving your husband? There is nothing wrong in it. God has ordained it.[192] This is what the sages have said. Marry me, be the head of all my other wives.[193] Fulfil my desire. I shall bow at your

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190. Aranya kanda, sarga 53, slokas 22, 23: Ravana summoned soldiers said, "Rama killed *my* army which I had placed in Janasthana". He does not say, "Rama killed *our* army. Rama is *our* enemy." Whatever the battles may be, it is an exclusive affair of the king. They say, "such and such a king won. Such and such a king is defeated." Even if thousands of soldiers die, it is a singular affair of the king. This is the characteristic of the feudal system.

If it is bourgeois system, this fraud will not be so open. They put on masks like "our nation" and "our country". They inject "*defence of the country*" to the soldiers. Soldiers do not benefit even from bourgeois wars. It is the ruling classes that gain. Soldiers, however, have to die for the sake of the countries and races! ★

191. "Youth is transitory. Enjoy pleasures with me in this house", says Ravana. Some *Haridasus*, devotees of god who narrate the stories of god, give false interpretations saying that Ravana treated Sita as his mother and considered her as 'goddess of the earth'. ★

192. Aranya kanda, sarga 55, slokas 34 & 35: The meaning of the words, "There is nothing wrong in it. God has ordained it" is that there is nothing wrong for men to get women showing their heroism. Such customs and traditions were prevalent in many races. ★

193. Aranya kanda, sarga 55, slokas 26, 27: "Be the head of all my other wives" says Rama. How long? Until next week when he brings another Sita! ★

feet. Just out of my longing for you, I say that I shall bow to you, otherwise will ever the Lord of Lanka say that he would bow to a woman? It is amazing to me how such mean words came out from my mouth!"[194] He looked with pride thinking that Sita would gladly agree.

Sita bowed her head in sorrow. Sita knew that wives devoted to their husbands should not talk to other men. So she picked up a blade of grass and placed it in front of her and, began talking.[195] "You base fellow! Are you a hero? In the absence of my husband you abducted me. My husband will throw even the sun and moon from the sky. Can't such a hero save his wife from the hands of an enemy? Just as an untouchable can not touch a sacrificial altar, you can not touch me. Torture me as you like. I have no longing to save my life. There is nothing more than this to speak to you," she kept silent uttering these few words.[196]

Ravana became angry. "You are defying my words. I shall give you only one year's time. If you do not change your mind by that time, you have to face death", he warned and moved away from there.[197]

Ravana summoned some maid servants and said, "Keep her in the garden, *Asoka vana*. That is a secret place. Guard her carefully. Make every possible effort to bring her under my control. Try to convince her. Threaten her. She is very arrogant. Don't show her mercy. Warn her cruelly." Saying these words Ravana looked at the maids threatening them.

The maid servants bowed and said, "Yes, your Excellency! We will follow your orders verbatim."

Ravana looked at Sita from a distance and went away.

All the maid servants gathered round Sita and took her to Asoka vana.

There are birds all over the trees, making noise. There are many new varieties of flowers which she had never seen. That place pleased Sita a bit.

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[Translation: **R. Venkateswara Rao**]

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[194] **Aranya kanda, sarga 55, sloka 36:** Ravana says, "Ravana will never bow his head to a woman. I said such mean words! Surprising!" Treating women as inferior is the same with Rama and Ravana. Both are the same in this respect. Both of them are male chauvinists. People who abuse Rama and praise Ravana, should take note of these things. It will be seen that both are the same in respect of all values. The esteemed poet does not like the idea of a wicked man like Ravana even saluting to a great virtuous woman like Sita. The poet makes him say, "What mean words I have said! Bowing to a woman?" However roguish a man might be, saluting to even a noble woman is a mean act, says the poet!) ★

[195] **Aranya kanda, sarga 56, sloka 1:** "Sita…in sorrow…with a view that virtuous women should not talk with men other than their husbands face to face, placed a blade of grass in between and said like this." Virtuous women strictly should not speak with other men. If it is unavoidable, it should not be face to face. That is a "good" woman should go behind the door or benches or chairs, or anything that is before them. ★

[196] **Aranya kanda, sarga 56, slokas 21:** Sita has no fear of losing life or torture. If Sita is born again in this age, she becomes a revolutionary reading Marxism (also *Ramayana*). Since she was born in a feudal system, she became such a 'devoted wife.' In this 56th sarga, Sita talked with Ravana a lot more. The same things she spoke in *Sundara kanda* also. All that becomes another story. That is why I am not mentioning here more things, which Sita talked. ★

[197] **Aranya kanda, sarga 56, slokas 24, 25:**

'Ravana gave her a deadline without touching her'—what does this mean? Isn't this amazing? We don't know what the trick involved in this is? ★

Story-5

Did She Heed?

The trees stood like green mountains. With his slanted looks, the sun is peeping under the trees. Birds are twittering around, about to leave for gathering food. Unable to convince their kids who refused to stay back in the nests, birds scolded and flew away after giving the little ones parting kisses. While they were flying some birds saw Rama from a distance and at once hid themselves under the leaves of the nearby trees.

"Black sage! Black sage! Hide! Hide!" some valorous birds shouted at others which continued to fly unaware of Rama.

All the trees extended their hands up to the sky with kindness and hid the birds which they could reach.

The birds hidden in the leaves whispered, "He sets out every day carrying those arrows. Wonder how much he eats. Wretched food....Killing daily....No mercy, no kindness...."

"See how fat he is? He never lifts a finger....Poor fellow, Lakshmana alone....all that drudgery...."

"That fellow isn't a kind soul either. Both are alike. The other day he came to fetch water and shot an arrow at me while I was drinking water at a distance. I escaped in the blink of an eye, you know! Oh! My heart is still beating fast."

"Before these two arrived, none of the hunters used to enter this thick forest, you know! Even if some guy came....it was *once in a month or six months*....It was enough if we hid for a short while. With these fellows, it has become a *daily death*."

"Look at those sages....Why should we alk *sinful words* about them....We should be air to them. They eat some grass or leaves. They chew some fruits that they find. They hang hemselves upside down, stand in a weird fashion, sit with their legs folded and crossed....We don't know what they are and what their penance and stuff is....But they never bother us!"

"You seem to be naïve. They don't kill us with arrows but if some one offered them baked meat pieces they eat them, *smacking their tongues*, you know? Some times, I go by their cottages to watch Sita? You know that big Banyan tree in front of their house? If you sit on the top branches, you can see Sita wherever she is in the backyard. From there I have seen Lakshmana many a time offering baked meat pieces to the sages, you know?"

"Oh, I see! So, they too eat meat? Well, at least they don't kill us with their own hands, do they? We don't have to hide when they come around, do we? Isn't that somewhat better? This black guy is arrantly merciless. He kills birds and animals as easily as he plucks leaves. Ugh! After this fellow's arrival, I had no *sleep*."

That's true! This sinful fellow *swallowed up my baby. Let death befall him!* The arrow this fellow shot hit my child in the chest and carried him away. I couldn't see my son again....I don't know when my curse will befall him..."

"Don't grieve sister-in-law! Don't grieve! What can we do? We have been watching from the time we were born - whether it is birds or human beings - every body is eager to fill his stomach. There is no other way."

"Do you think it is only for food? This fellow in fact kills for the sake of sport."

"Shh! Keep quiet!....He is coming towards our tree. Look, he is hiding, for a deer or some thing."

"Look at those eyes! How he frowns?"

"Shall I shit on him when he comes here?"

"Stop it! You are taking your life in your hands. Why play with a hunter?"

Silence all over! Ram came under the tree.

The tree stood seemingly indifferent to Rama, as if it were telling him, "There is nobody here. Go elsewhere."

Rama stood under the tree and looking around frowning. He wondered, "It appeared so clearly! Escaped in a flash. It entered one bush and appeared in another! It stands under one tree and appears under another! I will not leave it until I see its end. What did it think about me? Did it think that I am Sri Rama or not Sri Rama?"

A small baby rabbit was about to jump out of a nearby bush, her mother pulled her back in and smacked hard. "Haven't I been telling you for a long time not to move? You naughty girl. You are making my life hell since you learnt to run. Look at him, over there! That fellow with arrows....Do you see him?"

The baby rabbit saw Rama through a hole in the bush. Frightened, she tugged on to its mother and asked in fear, "How dark it is! Is it a devil?"

"Tut! Nonsense. Where do you learn these things? Don't believe all the trashy stories your dad tells you. He just tells you things for fun. Devils and monsters don't exist. Only humans exist. So far, I have not seen even a single devil. I have seen only humans, understand?" Her mother scolded her.

The naughty rabbit kid nodded its head and looked again through the hole. It saw the bow and arrows in Rama's hands. "Mom! I too want things like that! I want to play with them." It began hitting her mother and threw a tantrum.

Hearing the noise from the bush, Rama turned that side and aimed an arrow at them.

The rabbit trembled terribly. "Lie down! Lie down! He will kill us, he will kill us!", she covered the baby's mouth and threw her on the ground.

Rama knit his eyebrows, heard a noise at a distance, changed his aim and shot an arrow. Soon after it darted through the tree branches, a loud cry of a deer reverberated through the forest.

The baby rabbit was terrified and pushed itself into its mother's belly. "Mom! The deer cried! Why?"

"Didn't I tell you not to talk loudly? The dark guy hit it with that stick. What can it do but cry?"

"Oh, mom! Why? Will it not pain the deer?"

"Even if it pains, why will the hunter be merciful?"

"Tut! We should break those sticks."

The mother breathed an exhausted sigh of relief that they had escaped death for that day.

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Looking around and thinking, Rama walked about. 'It happened just as Lakshmana had said. Before dyeing Maricha cried, imitating my voice, "Sita! Lakshmana! Help! Help!" These Rakshasas have turned against me only because I am living in Janasthana.[198] I am sure this is a trick to harm me. On hearing Marcia's cries, Sita and Lakshmana must have been afraid. Sita might have asked Lakshmana to go and look for me![199] Will Lakshmana come, defying my orders? Will he behave independently? He will never do so! Is Sita safe?

Rama's eyes set on another deer running at a distance. "How fat it is! Its thighs are glittering with fat. I shouldn't leave it."

Rama's mind turned from Sita's safety to the fattened thighs of the deer. He aimed the arrow and chased it. All the animals in the vicinity ran helter-skelter, screaming with fear for their lives. The foxes, however, bayed with joy looking at Rama. Whenever Rama killed animals, he took away only certain parts. After that, the foxes had a feast on the leftovers!

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[198] **Aranya kanda, sarga 57, sloka 9:** "Enmity arose with Rakshasas because I was living in Janasthana," assumed Rama. This means, the enmity of Rakshasas with Rama is not because he had tortured Surpanakha. This is as if he has nothing to do with Surpanakha's episode. ★

[199] **Aranya kanda, sarga 57, slokas 5 & 6:** "If Sita and Lakshmana heard Maricha's cries, then Lakshmana, sent by Sita, would come to me quickly, thinking that it was my voice." - This is what Rama thought. Sita's fear on hearing screams similar to his voice and Lakshmana coming for him appear very natural to Rama. But later, he didn't want that to happen. See what he did when it happened so. ★

Rama was still chasing the deer. Finally, it got entangled in a bush and could not escape. The arrow pierced into its rib. Rolling on the ground, the animal struggled to run away to a distance. Gradually, it lowered its head and closed its eyes.

Rama finished it, quickly cut out the lumps of flesh, rolled them in leaves and left the place with big strides.[200]

"It is fattened nicely. How tasty it will be if it is fattened like this!....As soon as I reach, I should ask Sita to bake the pieces of this liver....Is Sita safe in fact? Why are foxes baying? Surprising? Why do foxes bay unless it is a bad omen? How can Sita be safe now? No wonder about the cries of the Rakshasa. But the cries of these foxes are quite strange! Sita, with beautiful buttocks....Alas! Why are these birds flying from the left?"

Lakshmana was coming towards him walking with big strides. Rama looked at him with great surprise. What? He has defied my order! He has violated the *vow of following the command of the elder brother*! How dare he! I did tell him not to leave the cottage!

Lakshmana, who came with big strides, bowed like a bow as he came near Rama and saluted obediently *bending his back, shoulder and the whole body*.

Rama looked at Lakshmana with fiery serenity. "Lakshmana! You have come away from the cottage! I never thought that you would do something so blameworthy![201]

Have you seen how many bad omens appear all around me? The foxes are howling weird. On seeing me, the birds are crying frightfully. It is strange! Will Sita be safe? I can't be certain. The Rakshasas might have killed and eaten her. Alas! Sita, with beautiful thighs...." Rama bent his head in sorrow and started to walk.

Lakshmana was confused. 'What is that Rakshasas eating Sita?' Lakshmana walked behind his brother anxiously? He understood that his brother was quite angry with him for he had left the cottage. Thinking that he should tell his brother that it was not his fault, Lakshmana folded his hands, cleared his voice and followed his brother slowly and obediently. He was eagerly waiting to plead as soon as his brother stopped talking.

Rama continued his talk. He changed the meat roll from the right hand to the left and held it tightly. "Lakshmana! That deer is a creature in disguise. It took me a long distance but died with one stroke of an arrow and fell on the

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200. Aranya kanda, sarga 44, sloka 27: "Sri Rama killed Maricha, and killed another animal, took its flesh and went away quickly towards Janasthana." On hearing Maricha's cries, Rama was afraid that some danger might befall Sita. Yet he again chased, hunted and killed another deer, cut it, took its flesh and set out. Elders say that "*the goodness of a good fellow is revealed in the matter of meat*." Is it because of this? If he sees birds or animals he must kill them! In the beginning of *Ramayana*, it was said that when a hunter killed a bird in a pair of birds, the other bird grieved and poetry emerged out of Valmiki since he heard the grief of that bird. Whenever Rama hunted, had he not separated any pair of birds or animals? If what the hunter did was vileness what would be the nature of Rama's action? ★

201. Aranya kanda, sarga 57, slokas 18 & 19: As soon as Lakshmana came to him, Rama said, "Alas! You have come leaving the cottage!" See when Lakshmana answered Rama. See how Rama is lamenting on the basis of the cries of the fox much before Lakshmana opened his mouth and replied! Of course, Rama's attitude is *not new to us*! ★

ground....Alas, my left eye is twitching![202]

Sita is no longer there! No doubt. The Rakshasas must have killed her and eaten her up deliciously. There was no one to protect her! She had become a destitute despite being the wife of a great hero like me. On seeing her alone, the Rakshasas must have surrounded her....Yes....it was a good opportunity for them....Alas! My Sita, with the beautiful body...." Rama still continued to talk. He wonders why Lakshmana is not taking the meat roll from his hand. Is he becoming an independent man? Is he giving up servile attitude?

To prove how sinful it was on the part of Lakshmana to defy his order and act independently, Rama seemed to feel happy if some harm had surely befallen Sita. Even if nothing had happened for now, Rama is describing as if what a terrible thing would have happened if Lakshmana defied his order and what a terrible thing is fortuitously missed. "I don't have any doubt any more. Sita is no more! Some cruel animal....must have jumped on her, torn her apart and eaten her up. Alas! Sita has become a destitute even though she has her husband!"

As if praising the Rakshasas for making such a good use of an excellent opportunity, Rama said, "The Rakshasas come together around her....broke her hands and legs....yes....broke her neck....enjoy drinking her blood.....cut her up into pieces and distribute them among themselves....Alas! My Sita...My....."

Lakshmana was getting increasingly anxious. He was unable to see his brother's grief. He began to wonder if it was his mistake to have come here leaving the cottage. My sister-in-law was safe until I left the cottage. Something must have really happened after that."

"It shouldn't happen, it shouldn't happen." He prayed to *a thousand gods*. To tell his brother what had actually happened, he was about to open his mouth, "Brother..."

"Alas! My left shoulder is twitching", said Rama, shifting the meat roll every other moment from hand to hand, not being used to carrying things.

Only then did it strike to Lakshmana. He at once took the meat roll from his brother. He felt depressed with repentance that he had made his brother carry that roll so long.

Rama sighed deeply and continued his grief. "Lakshmana! Sita came to the terrible forests along with me. Though I lost the kingdom and landed in misery, Sita, without abandoning me, shared all my grief. My Sita is a beauty with a small waist. I would not wish for Indra's position, leaving her.[203]

She is dearer to me than my own life! I *cannot live without dyeing at once* for Sita, you know! I came here to live in the forest for fourteen years as per father's command. Will my pledge go unfulfilled? You have to go back to Ayodhya, Lakshmana! So, Kaika's wishes will come eternally true. My mother alone will become the unfortunate one. Having lost her son, she will sink in the ocean of sorrow. Serving Kaika, who got her son, kingdom and everything and whose wishes have been fulfilled, my mother will have to liver under the control of her rival-wife, won't she?....See what a lot of trouble we have got into because of you!"

Lakshmana's commonsense was outraged at Lakshmana more than at Rama. What is this nonsense? He doesn't let you open your mouth. He won't *allow your word to enter his ears*. He has fixed you and is trashing you. Why doesn't he listen to your word as to why you actually came? How long will you keep quiet while he unjustly blames you? Can't you boldly intrude, and interrupt him at some point? Hell with your hesitation! You don't have any sense, though you have grown older in years." Lakshmana's common sense *scolded him roundly*.

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[202] This left eye has always been twitching since Rama was ready for coronation! Not on one or two days but for fourteen years! It would be nice if some sage treats it a little. Pity, it twitches even for sages - either shoulders or knees! ★

[203] **Aranya kanda, sarga 58, sloka 5:** "Lakshmana! Leaving Sita, I won't wish lordship over gods and earth", says Rama. Every body knows whether he will abandon Sita for the sake of lordship over land (kingship). ★

Lakshmana thought of speaking somewhat boldly with his brother.

"Brother....!"

"Lakshmana! I will come to the cottage only if Sita is alive. Otherwise...." Rama, who was grieving and walking with slow paces, stopped and stood under a tree. "If Sita has died, I will end my life....right here!" said Rama and looked as if saying, "Look! What a tragedy is going to take place because you violated my order."[204]

Lakshmana is alarmed. Not knowing what to do, he bowed further at the waist and looked at the ground. "Whether Sita is alive or not, how will we find out? Can we find out about her if we sit here? Goodness! I just don't understand the crazy, reverse attitude of your brother", vexed Lakshmana's common sense, again.

Resting his head against a low branch, Rama said, "Lakshmana! If I don't see Sita with a smiling face when we go to the cottage...." So saying, he closed his eyes.

"Thank goodness! So, he will come to the cottage! I thought he will not at all move from here. But,....if Sita is safe, it is fine! Otherwise, he will not let me live in peaces. Anyway, don't lose heart! Be courageous! It is not your fault. If you had listened to me your life would have improved a long time ago", sneered Lakshmana's common sense at him. It has a lot of sympathy for Lakshmana.

The scolding by his common sense came as a gift from god to Lakshmana. He gathered some courage.

Rama lifted his head off the branch, opened his eyes and said, "Lakshmana! Tell me the truth! Tell me the truth! Is Sita alive? Did Rakshasas eat her because of your carelessness? Alas! There is a separation between my beloved and me. This is the truth. This is separation. I had gone away with the confidence that you would protect Sit. I am totally devastated." He again leaned wholly against the branch.

Trembling and crying, the branch said to its mother, "Mom! Look at this Rama! He is so heavy! He is going to break me off! I am dying!"

The tree realised that the branch was breaking off. "No, you need not worry. I have held you tight. But be a bit patient! I will send the giant ants now to bite his cheeks off. I will ask them 'who will go boldly?' the mother consoled the branch.

All the ants - black, white and yellow - came forward saying, "I'll go! I'll go!" They began to crawl *with the speed of an arrow* toward the branch against which Rama leaned.

Rama closed his eyes and leaned against the branch. His inner self began to appeal with slight hesitation. "Well, why did Lakshmana come....Let him tell....No! I am not as great as to advise you...I said just like that...That's all....I said just like that....Just like that..." It disappeared.

Rama jumped up as if a scorpion had stung him. He rubbed his cheek. Brushed off his back and arm-pits *serenely*. A few giant ants became '*martyrs*' in that struggle.

Rama looked up at the branch. Rows of ants had lined up all along the branch as if a clever commander had worked out a war strategy! Briskly Rama walked away from under the tree.

A swelling of the *size of a baby frog* appeared on Rama's left cheek. Another under his arm pit. Lakshmana has not seen those black baby frogs.

Rama's anger turned from the ants to the inner self that had disappeared quite a while ago. "Should I listen to Lakshmana? What more should I listen? He shouted at his own

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204. Aranya kanda, sarga 58, sloka 9: "I will go to the cottage only if Sita is alive. Otherwise I will give up my life", says Rama. Lakshmana has *not yet opened his mouth*. Rama has not yet heard what has happened. He says he will die right there! ★

inner self.

Rama looked at Lakshmana angrily. "Frightened by the screams of the Rakshasa, Sita might have sent you. Is that it? What else can you say, after all?"[205]

"What a bad thing you have done! Direct enmity between me and the Rakshasas began since I killed Khara. You have created a beautiful opportunity for my enemies to strike back at me.[206]

Alas! The left part of my heart is quivering. I am *drowned in so many worries*! What can I do now? The whole thing has gone awry. I just have to suffer it?" He looked at Lakshmana complainingly, turned his face and resumed walking.

On seeing his brother's pathetic situation, Lakshmana was convinced that he had made a mistake. He could not control his grief over there, his sister-in-law had uttered unbearable words *as if burning stakes had been applied to his ears*. "You base fellow! You wish for your brother's death. You have your eyes on me. That is why you have come with us with your evil plans" - Already his heart was aggrieved by these words, now his brother's accusation, "You have defied my orders! You have come away leaving the cottage!"

Unable to bear the admonition, Lakshmana saluted his brother's feet with tears gushing out and submitted. "Forgive me brother-sir! I swear on your sacred feet. I am not independent. I have not come here of my own accord, defying your sacred order.[207]

When sister-in-law heard those pitiable distress calls, 'Sita! Lakshmana! Come, help me, help me', she was frightened. Thinking that you were in some terrible danger, she hurried me, 'Lakshmana! Go quickly to your brother! Go!' I told her a lot about your valour and bravery. "Sri Ramachandra who can conquer even Devendra; can he be killed at the hands of a base Rakshasa? Those cries are not my brother's. Could Sri Rama, born in the Raghu dynasty, stoop to asking a woman to protect him? Be courageous, sister-in-law! No harm will happen to my brother. So far none is born to conquer my brother in battle. Nor will be born in the future. Though I told her this in many ways...." Lakshmana is appealing *without unfolding his saluting hands*.

Rama's face began to blossom like a Lotus

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205. Aranya kanda, sarga 58, slokas 13 & 14: Rama is saying to Lakshmana, "On hearing Maricha's screams, Sita might have been frightened. Perhaps she had sent you. Perhaps, you came. - This is what I am imagining". The man who imagined so much, why couldn't he imagine as to what had happened to Sita? Perhaps he might not know. Rama is very enthusiastic to grieve over the separation from his wife. As it would not be possible to wail if Sita were safe by the time he reached the cottage, he wailed in various ways. ★

206. Aranya kanda, sarga 58, sloka 15: "You created an opportunity for the sinful Rakshasas to harm me in return", says Rama. It is Rama's opinion that Khara came to war since he lived in Janasthana and they would harm him by killing Sita because he had killed Khara. This enmity is between the Rakshasas and himself. It has nothing to do with Lakshmana! He is a slave. Whatever happens is something to do with the master. That's why Rama says, "harm *me*"; he doesn't say, "*us*". ★

207. Aranya kanda, sarga 59, slokas 5 & 6: Aggrieved by hearing Sita's words a while ago and having felt extremely sorry because Sri Rama has now accused him that he had done a bad thing, Lakshmana said to Rama as follows: "I have not come here leaving Sita on my own...." The question here is, whether Lakshmana had acted independently or followed his brother's order. Lakshmana is appealing that he has not acted independently. This is an important aspect of feudal culture. Every moment is an alarming moment that wives, children, younger brothers and servants may act independently! There is anxiety to tie up their feet, hands and mouths with duties, morals and vows! ★

leaf…blossomed…blossomed….and exceeded the dimensions of a lotus leaf.

".....Respected sister-in-law did not at all believe my words. Moreover, she hurled many terrible allegations and….", trying to steady his quivering voice, Lakshmana continued, "….that I came….carnally desiring her…." Unable to continue, Lakshmana paused.

Rama is startled, "What did she say?"

Lakshmana felt ashamed. "….I cannot utter those words…That I followed you with the evil thought, she said! That I was waiting for carnally desiring her! 'Base fellow! Finally I have realised your villainy now. You are not going to save your brother', thus she continued to revile me. So, I came away, my brother, as I could not stand it any longer. Punish me if I am at fault, but I am not a person who would dare neglect your orders…."

Rama could not hear any more. 'Did Sita accuse Lakshmana like that? Why would she say such thing! For no reason? Did he ever….this villain….her….when she was alone…otherwise, why would she say such a thing? She never told me! Did she hesitate, fearing I would be furious? But if Lakshmana had the evil thought…he himself is submitting all that Sita said?' - Rama's brain is reeling. Looking at Lakshmana, Rama felt like jumping at him and strangling him to death. "Tell me the truth, you wicked fellow! Behind my back did you every try to possess her. Yes, you did, didn't you? You pulled her sari down, didn't you?" His heart is jumping like a flood tide to ask Lakshmana. In that anger, Rama walked ahead with steps that shook the earth.

Walking by Rama's side obediently, Lakshmana muttered swallowing words. "This slave acting independently…defying your order…Serving at your feet is the salvation for this life…."

Rama rebuked him angrily by *showering fire*. "Lakshmana! Besides violating my order, why these prayers and appeals? It's useless! You are aware of my courage and boldness, aren't you? Just because women say something in anger, does a wise man behave in a way that can cause harm to women? Why did you become angry at the words of Sita? …. You have left Sita alone and violated my order! What a blunder it is! You have done injustice to me in all ways." [208]

Distressed and pressed between that famed 'devoted wife' and this 'great warrior', Lakshmana bent his head and *controlled his tears*. Even his common sense ground its teeth, not knowing what else to do. As he walked, Lakshmana's heart palpitated in anxiety wondering whether Sita was in the cottage or not. His heart is beating, "Is she there or not? Is she there or not?"

Until they reached the cottage, Rama continued to fret. When he glanced at Lakshmana sidelong, Rama's inner soul took a

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208. Aranya kanda, sarga 59, slokas 23 & 24: Even after Lakshmana explained the whole thing, Rama says, "I am not happy with you! Influenced by Sita's words, you got angry and violated my orders. You have done injustice in every way." This means, the poet concluded that Lakshmana had made a mistake. It was Sita's mistake to blame Lakshmana. It was Lakshmana's mistake to violate his brother's order even if Sita had blamed him. But Rama is never wrong.

Rama was very frightened when he heard screams of Maricha. Rama also naturally felt that Sita would also get frightened and send Lakshmana for him. When it happened so, it became a 'violation of his order.' If Lakshmana had not come, Rama would have scolded him, "You don't bother to come even if I had died? You don't bother even if Rakshasas cut me up into pieces…You wouldn't have moved from there even if I had cried for help." Well, we can't say anything! As his mentality is revealing itself, Rama is turning into Ravana, my good ness! Just as some one wrote the play, 'Battle between Rama and Hanuman', one can write a beautiful play based on this scene wherein Rama and Lakshmana are angry at each other, under the title, "Battle between Rama and Lakshmana'.

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little initiative - *as little as that of the head of an ant* - and muttered with hesitation and fear, "Suspecting Lakshmana…it is wrong, you see! It is hasty, you know!...."

Rama too remained silent, nodding his head.

"Yes, he is my slave…Yes, faithful…But one should not trust women. Fools. Fickle minded. They do make unjust allegations. That's what it is…That's all! He immersed himself in thought.

★ ★ ★

The entire house was in disarray and disorderly. All the seats of sacred grass had been thrown and scattered helter-skelter about the room. Flowers and fruits were strewn all over the floor.

There was no sign of Sita! She is not in the backyard….or even in the midst of plants.

Lakshmana felt as if he had gone mad.

Rama is raining questions like shooting of arrows.

"Rakshasas might have abducted Sita! She might have died! She might have hidden somewhere out of fear! Or she might have gone to pluck some flowers! Has she gone for bathing? Has she gone to fetch water?[209]

Has she gone to wash clothes? Why has she left without putting the things of the cottage in order and even closing the door?

The two of them are going around the cottage.

"Sita! Sita!"

"Respected sister-in-law!"

"Sita!..."

"Respected sister-in-law!"

They called out a few times.

They looked around her favourite trees.

Fear began in Lakshmana. "What is this? Did something really happen?....Alas! Had danger befallen sister-in-law? Due to my fault, has sister-in-law been trapped in to danger? What a terrible mistake on my part!...Alas!"

It was a surprise to Rama because anything like this had never happened before! Sita never goes alone anywhere! The entire mistake is Lakshmana's. How do we find Sita now?....Is this a romantic separation? Is it a separation that will remain forever between us? Oh dear Sita![210]

Rama, who studied all sciences, also studied 'sexology'. All these days, he had tasted only 'sexual union' (*samyoga sringara*) but could not taste 'sexual separation' (*viraha sringara*). Sita had always been by his side ever since they were married. There had never been separation (*viyoga*), romance of separation (*viraha*) or sexual separation (*viraha sringara*)!

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209. Aranya kanda, sarga 60, slokas 8 & 9: Rama's doubts: "Has Sita gone to pluck flowers? Has she gone to fetch water? Has she gone to bathe?....Has she hidden somewhere out of fear? This is how he wondered. Then why should he raise a cry that Rakshasas had eaten away her, or cut her up into pieces?

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210. Beginning from **sarga 57** of **Aranya kanda** through *Kishkindha kanda, Sundara kanda, Yuddha kanda* and until Rama attained mental peace after his coronation, we will see abundantly scenes in which he experiences the 'romance of separation' for the company of Sita.

Separation or romantic separation means, both man and woman separate temporarily. Both should know where the other person is. There should be a scope for their reunion. There should be confidence that danger has befallen none. Then, they can experience the 'romance of separation' though it is difficult. But, the situation here is not like that. Rama does not know what has happened to Sita; Sita does not know what has happened to Rama. (He, who left to get the deer, has not yet come back. Moreover, there were screams of death from the forest, 'Save me! Save me!') It was Rama's strong belief that Rakshasas had killed Sita…eaten her away and digested. Is such a situation a context for enjoying 'romantic separation'? The poet is describing as if Rama is awaiting Sita with romantic separation. We don't find appropriateness of the context in any scene.

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Now, this is separation.

Rama thought for a while and recollected the characteristics of sexual separation.

Lovers or wife and husband, when they are separated, should experience that separation in ten different ways, conditions or states. Desire (*Abhilasha*), Mental union (*Manassangamam*), Resolve (*Sankalpam*), Description of qualities (*Guna varnana*), hatred (*Pradveshamu*), the fire of Sex (*taapam*), Sacrifice of Self-interest (*Abhimata tyagam*), Madness (*Unmaadam*), Fainting… fainting… fain… ting… thus, then he remembered the nine conditions. The tenth one…the tenth one…He could not recollect the tenth state however hard he thought about it. Again, he recited rapidly from the beginning...... Abhila.... Manas..... Sankalpa.... Guna Varna..... Predwesh.....” This time he forgot some more. He could not recollect the last one.

Well, won't he remember the tenth state, if he in the meantime, act all these three states?

Thinking to try once again he closed his eyes a bit and slowly repeated like an ascetic thus, “*Abhilasha, Manssangamam, Sankalpam...*” Suddenly he remembered it in the middle itself. The tenth stage is ‘death.... death…death’! Yes, death is next to fainting. If the love does not come near even after grieving in nine different ways, one has to die finally. The beloved too should die wherever she is. But Sita had not studied that Sexology well. Will she learn about these stages? Well, I should follow all these scientific principles. Already he had practised some of these stages as described in the texts. He has exhibited ‘desire’ for Sita…described Sita's qualities very well. Sacrificed all his interests for the sake of Sita… He declared he wouldn't go to Ayodhya…Now he has to practise the other stages. After all, one oughtn't disregard the scientific principles!

“Oh, dear Sita!” he cried loudly, *with his hands held up*.

Lakshmana's grief is uncontrollable. He is feeling extremely sorry that all this has happened due to his fault. Enemies must have carried away respected sister-in-law somewhere. Or they might have hidden her in some cave nearby. We may find her if we search immediately.

Feeling ashamed to look at his brother's face, Lakshmana bowed and saluted his feet. “Brother, sir! We should at once....” he tried to appeal.[211]

With grief and enhanced infatuation for his wife, Rama is acting out the condition of conversing with inanimate objects treating them as animate. “Oh, *Kadamba* tree! Did Sita come to pluck your flowers? Oh, *Arjuna* tree! Do you know Sita who is very fond of your flowers? Oh, *Bilva* tree! Have you seen Sita who has breasts that resemble your fruits? Alas! This banyan tree must know, but it is not telling! Oh, *Asoka* tree! Won't you relieve my *Soka* (grief). Oh, *Tala* tree! What happened to…my wife with breasts of the size of your fruits…My Sita, with thighs like the trunks of Banyan trees….My Sita, with the complexion of *Sampenga* flower. Tell me without fear. Don't be afraid! I will remove your fear. You remove my grief!”

“Brother, sir! We have already searched all these surroundings. We have to hurry a little….at a distance….”

“Oh, *Madhavi* creeper, have you seen my Sita?” said Rama and turned left side. “Oh, Jasmine creeper, have you not seen Sita with high buttocks?” asked Rama and turned to the right. “Oh, *Sannajaji*, have you not seen Sita who moves gently like you with her thin waist”, he asked very eagerly thinking that the Jasmine

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211. Aranya kanda, sarga 60, last slokas: ‘Sri Rama repeatedly searched for Sita in the forests, rivers, hills, streams and places where it is impossible to enter’. If he had searched all places so carefully why did he not, at the beginning, find Jatayu who was lying in the vicinity of his cottage itself?

See the last sloka in sarga 61: “Ignoring Lakshmana's words, Rama was calling out in a loud voice, “Oh, beloved!” Neither had he heard what Lakshmana said nor did he search for Sita. ★

might have seen Sita whom the Madhavi creeper, which was there, did not see! Thinking that Sannajaji might have seen Sita whom Jasmine, which was there, has not seen!

He stood there asking each bushy plant, each tree, each creeper and each leaf by name. Rama's inner self said with fear and hesitation, "Why ask plants? Will they talk or tell us?...Oh, no! Plants never talk to us, you know! I have a doubt…Just…" It withdrew bashfully.

Rama harshly entered into a fight with the inner self. "Yes, you always have doubts…They wrote in the scriptures that this is how one has to experience sexual separation. Why do you murmur as if you don't know? One has to ask the trees first. Then the birds and animals. Why do you still have doubts when our elders had said a long time ago? Do you want to defy the scriptural principles or what?"

"No, no! Not at all! Do I dare to say so? No. Will Sri Rama defy scriptures?....I just…."

"What then? Why do you have this doubt?"

"Oh, the doubts…they are gone, long ago. Vanished totally. Yes, yes. One has to follow the scriptures…Loook there! Ask those *Sampenga* flowers. They must have seen Sita", his inner self showed Rama *Sampenga* flowers and slipped away.

Rama looked that side! Yellow Sampangas were swinging in their mother's lap. Rama looked at one flower and said, "Oh, Sampenga flower! Your colour and Sita's complexion are alike. The Rakshasas have made a hearty meal out of her." He looked as if to say, "How come they didn't eat you?"

Frightened at Rama's intense looks, the flower cried, "Mother! Look at Rama, how he frightens me!"

"Oh, no. He is not frightening. He is not finding Sita. He is asking you if you have seen her.."

"A while ago he asked you, didn't he? Then why does he ask me again? If he does like this, when will he search for Sita?"

"He doesn't want to search. What fun there will be if he finds her? He is enacting romantic separation as per the instructions of their scriptures. That's all!"

"I don't know, Mother! I am afraid! He is looking angrily!"

"No, no! Look, he is going to the other side."

Rama stood near another flower.

Lakshmana looked around anxiously hoping that Sita might appear suddenly. "Have you seen Sita", asked Rama all the trees: *Chuta, Vippa, Panasa, Kanikada, Badisa, Karaka, Loddugu, Maddili and Vavili.*

All remained silent. The creeper on the banyan tree, with red flowers, whispered to the tree, "Poor fellow, Rama is grieving. Shall we tell him?"

"No. Let us see how he will free her. He boasts all the time that he is so great, that he is very great."

"Why do you call it boasting? He is a hero, isn't he?"

The red flowered creeper thought a bit and expressed fear, "Not for the sake of Rama. Shouldn't we tell him at least for the sake of Sita?...That Ravana may kill Sita?"

"Nonsense! Why will he kill her? He took her away to marry her. If he wanted to kill her, wouldn't he have killed her right there?"

"How can he marry her? Sita already has a husband!"

"So what? Whoever is braver will be the husband. Oh!...You don't know how many such instances I have seen! What do you know? You were born just the other day…." - Banyan tree.

"When were you born?"

"Me? May be over a thousand years ago. The world has changed so much before my eyes….When I was young, humans used to be very innocent! My grandpa used to tell me that this conjugal fidelity and such nonsense were not there at that time, you know?"

"May be they were absent, but didn't they have 'love'? Love was always there. Isn't it wrong that Rama took away Sita although she was not in love with him? He must be punished…Poor fellow Rama asks birds. I feel sorry for him."

Rama asked the carpenter bees buzzing

among the leaves. With stretched hands, he asked the birds. The birds flew away, perplexed.

"Lakshmana! Look, all these deer seem to be talking among themselves that Rakshasas have eaten Sita."[212]

"O Deer! My love Sita has eyes exactly like yours. She is easily alarmed like a deer. She might have joined your herd. Won't you tell her, her husband has come?"

The deer ran away in fear.

Rama asked elephants, "Sita's thighs look like your trunks. She must be in your herd."

The elephants didn't seem to have any respect at all for the science of sexual separation. Flapping their ears, they swat away Rama's words before they entered their ears and walked toward the river.

"I have heard that Rama is a king?"

"That's right. Though he is in the attire of a sage, he will drive all of us away when he goes back to his kingdom to enhance his elephant army."

"Oh, Mother! We shouldn't believe kings. How dangerous they are. They are cruel."

"They always fight. Why don't the kings fight by hitting each other, or killing each other? They forcibly take us and engage us in wars. Tut! How shameless they are!"

"Alas! They drag their own humans into fights. Do you think they will spare us?"

"From tomorrow don't go toward Rama's house. If he *keeps an eye* he would take us with him. It is better to be safe than sorry. *First think about harm and then about good!*" said an elderly elephant.

"We won't go! We won't go!" agreed all the big elephants.

The mother-elephants said to the baby elephants who were leaping instead of walking, "Don't go toward the house of that black sage, understand?"

"What if we go?"

"Oh, no! He will take you away to his kingdom."

"So what if he takes us away?"

"Oh, no! He will engage us in battles."

"What if he does?"

"Oh, no! we will die."

"So, what if we die?"

"I don't know! It is difficult to chatter with you!"

"Mom! Let us go *happily* along with Rama to his village…Let us die….Mom! Let us die", a baby elephant started crying. Her mother got irritated and spanked her with her trunk. The other elephants scolded the mother elephant, "Alas! What does it know? It is a kid! You gave it a sound spanking. Stop it!"

Wailing, Rama asked the very big trees about Sita.

In the branches of a mango tree, a baby parrot was nagging her mother, "Mother! Sita asked us to tell Rama, didn't she? Poor Sita, she asked us sobbing, didn't she? Then why don't you tell Rama?"

The mother-parrot said angrily, "Because she was in danger today, she pleaded with us, crying and all, but does she care for us when Rama shoots arrows at us every day? That poor deer….how pretty she was! Didn't Sita ask him to kill the deer and bring her its skin? Why should we show sympathy even if she told us crying? It is enough if Rama leaves this place in his search for Sita. We can live happily from tomorrow.

The baby parrot stuck her red beak out of the nest and cried out, "Rama! We know where Sita is, but we won't tell you. You have to find

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212. Aranya kanda, sarga 62, sloka 9: "This herd of deer seem to say that the night-wanderers (the Rakshasas) have eaten Sita", says Rama. Rama thinks that birds, animals, trees, ant hills and every thing is expressing his views. If he were happy, all of them would say, "Amen to Rama!" If he lost the kingdom, they would say, "Forest life to Rama?"

If at all deer can think anything after Ravana had abducted Sita, they will think, "Alas! Ravana has abducted Sita!" But they won't think, "Rakshasas have eaten Sita", will they? This means, Rama cannot grasp what the deer are thinking. Rama always assumes that animals and birds think in his favour only. ★

her all by yourself."

Scared that Rama might have heard it, the mother-parrot scolded the baby and hid her under her wings.

In the distance a number of deer gathered in the bushes talking with wonder. "He is asking trees, ant hills, crows and sparrows but not the sages, why?"

"Why don't those folks come and tell him whatever they saw? What sort of a wonder is this? This is too much!"[213]

"Well, why do we bother with their headache? We will get rid of Rama's menace. Though all the sages ask him to end the menace of Ravana, we have to get rid of Rama's menace."

"Yes. It is scary to get down to the river and drink water. It is scarier to run freely into meadows and graze. How straight he shoots those arrows! *May his hands break!*

"After such a long a time, a good thing has happened! Now he will leave."

Lakshmana is eager to search the whole forest very quickly and do some thing to find Sita. Rama stops at each tree. While a bird flies, he runs behind it and asks it.

"Sita! The lining of your teeth…Your nose….Your ears….Your lips…:, saying Rama.

"Brother, sir! We….quickly…."

Rama is not in a mood to listen. "Sita! You have never played a joke this long before. Even if you are hiding, why do you hide so long? You are ignoring your husband as well?...Lakshmana! Rakshasas must have distributed Sita's hands and legs among themselves and eaten her."

"Brother-sir! Inflict me! Punish me! I deserve punishment! I deserve!" Lakshmana shed tears profusely.

"How beautiful is the face of my love! How glittering her ear rings! That necklace…those diamond studded chains…those anklets…There! There is my Sita! My love! Why don't you stay there?...You hid in the trees?" Rama ran towards a tree.

Lakshmana too ran behind Rama.

Rama turned around suddenly and asked Lakshmana sharply, "Lakshmana! Have you seen my Sita?" He looked at Lakshmana angrily. Lakshmana bent his head in grief.

Although he has little doubt as to when he should enact the stage of 'madness', Rama quickly descended into the stage of madness with satisfaction and emotion that he was experiencing Sita's separation as per the principles of Sexology. "Look, over there! My love! My Sita…Oh, my love! Oh, my dear Sita!...." Rama is shouting and running from tree to tree. Birds are flying away with a hue and cry from every tree wherever Rama went. They scattered helter-skelter. Cries! Caws! Curses! Screaming!

Looking at the state of his brother, both the eyes of Lakshmana are *oozing out tears like a gushing well*. Unable to leave him, he is also running behind him. He is unable to think what else he should do. 'Should I go to the cottage first and bake a few meat pieces for brother?....Should I go in search of sister-in-law? If I have to go…should I leave behind sister-in-law's jewels, saris in the cottage?' He is unable to decide.

Lakshmana's common sense said sarcastically, "If this is the way you search for her, you won't go beyond the cottage any way. Don't worry about jewels and Saris! You can keep an eye on the cottage."

Lakshmana kept quiet as if he had not

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213. "Why doesn't Rama ask the sages about Sita?" - At least the animals raise this question and not the devotees of Rama. That *Dandakaranya* is full of sages. Moreover they saw Ravana carrying away Sita. No fellow says any thing while Rama is wailing. Stranger than this is: Rama ignores the fact that Jatayu must be sitting on a tree near the cottage. If he is concerned with all that, then how to enact a sexual separation? The entire story goes as per the whims and fancy of the poet. While writing the stories of autocratic kings, the poets too become autocrats! Whereas the readers become worms or insect. They believe whatever the poets say. There is no question of questioning!

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heard it.

If he could speak with his brother, they could decide what to do, but the brother is not in this world! He *is drowned in the ocean of sorrow*.

Lakshmana, who was thinking, saw Rama running somewhere and he too ran behind him. For some time, they ran around the cottage, trees and rocks. After roaming around, they returned to the same spot from where they had started!

It was very hot. The sun was directly over head.

Rama was hungry and tired because of the running.[214]

As Sita had not shown up for so long, Rama began to get angry. He looked at Lakshmana with anger. He bullied Lakshmana, "Can women go about alone? Didn't you tell Sita not to go out of the cottage?"

Lakshmana could not remember what he had said like that to sister-in-law. He shivered very much with fear.

Suddenly Rama remembered another state in the sexual separation. He shouted harshly at a bush, "Sita! Stop joking! It is not proper to behave like this with the husband who has roamed the entire forest and is tired. Amidst hermitages where sages live, excessive joking with the husband does not behove you. Stop your pranks and come out!"

The bush did not respond.

"Sister-in-law! We have come. You don't need to be afraid. If you are hiding anywhere, please come out. Lakshmana trained his sorrow-choked voice and cried out with all the energy he could muster.

Contracting his wide forehead, Rama frowned and let that frowning spread up to the entire cottage and said, "Sita! Your joking was dear to me in the past. Now it is not tasteful!"

Stepping away from the bush, he stood facing a mountain and asked serenely, "Tell me. Have you seen Sita?"

The mountain too asked with the same serenity, "Tell me. Have you seen Sita?"

Rama is outraged. "What? You dare joke with me? If you don't return my pretty Sita, you better watch out… I will break you into pieces with my arrows. I will see that no tree or grass grow on you. Understand? Show me Sita quickly" Rama roared.

The mountain spoke along with Rama. At the end it roared at Rama, "Show me Sita quickly!"

Scared, as his brother prepared to fight with the mountain, Lakshmana submitted to his brother with salutation. "Brother! Be calm! How dare the mountain joke with you? It is echoing with its natural property."

"Is that it, Lakshmana?"

"Yes, that's all, Brother-sir! That's all!"

Taking strides with a terrifying posture, Rama walked for some distance and stood on the bank of Godavari. "Godavari! Has Sita - who has thighs like the trunks of Banyan trees - come to visit you? Did she bath in your waters? Tell me quickly!" asked Rama, stretching out his hands.

Like a little girl engrossed in her game, kissing the flowers that were falling into the waves all along the banks, Godavari was rejoicing in conversation with them and continued moving forward rapturously without noticing Rama.

Rama became furious. "Lakshmana! This river is arrogantly silent. See, I will dry it out with the shots of my arrows."

"Please calm down brother-sir! Be merciful to Godavari! This poor river is frightened even to speak to you."

"Is that what it is?"

"Yes, yes. That's all, brother, that's all!"

Lakshmana's commonsense was burning

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214. Aranya kanda, sarga 58, sloka 19: Pity, that poet esquire has rightly understood the hunger of Rama. The poet described Rama's hardships as follows: "Severely reproaching Lakshmana…Sri Rama, whose mouth was parched from hunger, fatigue and thirst, grew despondent…" ★

with anger. It tried to be tolerant but unable to bear it, grinding his teeth, it began to scold Lakshmana. "If your brother doesn't have any sense, what about you? Will both of you search for Sita or not? Don't you know that your brother has got used to that crazy, useless, Sanskrit poetry? He will continue to twist and turn acting out pangs of separation, why don't you go far out and search."

Lakshmana said to his common sense murmuring, "Well, if I leave my brother…in this mentally deranged state…Having lost his wife…"

"Mentally deranged, my foot! If he is deranged, what about that poetry?...Without missing the line…rhythmically and prosadically…"

"Yes, yes, yes, but learned people retain knowledge of language even when they are deranged."

"My foot…know….ledge…of language?"

While the sun is burning bright, Rama moved into the shade of a tree, screwed up his eyes and asked the Sun about Sita. When a sudden gust of 'wind' blew he asked him the whereabouts of Sita.

"Brother-sir! We have to…. go quickly….to a long distance and see"

Walking slowly, Rama sighed. "Lakshmana! Look at this flower bush…and this dune! Isn't it here that Sita sat by my side and talked to you?" said Rama and stopped at that bush. Those bushes, dunes and everything is about a fathom from the cottage!

Lakshmana too was plunged into sorrow. Alas! We have not yet crossed the surroundings of the cottage! In this vast, impenetrable forest…when will we…be able to see sister-in-law? "Brother-sir! Let us search quickly…"

"Lakshmana! I cannot live without Sita" looking intensely at the trunk and the branches of a Jack fruit tree and then slid down to the base of the trunk.

Lakshmana bowed in front of Rama with his hands crossed in the front.

"Lakshmana! I will reach the presence of our respected father. Then our father-sir may abuse me, 'Wicked fellow! You promised me to live in the forest for fourteen years but have come here without fulfilling the promise. You are an independent being,…have no reverence for your father! You are a liar!'…Alas! Sita! You have turned me into an untruthful person?" Rama lowered his head.

Lakshmana ventured to say humbly. "Brother! It's no use grieving. You should be bold. This forest is filled with caves and bushes. Sister-in-law is fond of trees and rivers. May be she went to look at some lake and lost her way…."

"What?...Does Sita go around alone? What?...Did she ever go in my absence?"

"No, no. Never did she go. Me…doubt…"

"Huh! Doubt!…Where is Sita? Wild animals or Rakshasas…."

"Brother, sir! Don't be disheartened. You are a great hero. Didn't Lord Vishnu suppress *Bali* and get the earth? Similarly, you too can search and get back sister-in-law wherever she is. We have to search quickly in all the corners of this forest."

Rama looked lost. 'What? Is Sita really lost? Is it not enough to grieve in poetic fashion? Should I also search?' Rama sighed deeply. His eyes closed with fatigue and hunger. The body is *sliding into a sleepy state*. "Lakshmana!" said Rama, opening his eyes forcibly. "Now you go back to Ayodhya! I will breathe my last right here. Tell Bharata I would like him to rule over the Kosala kingdom. Tell him it is Sri Rama's order to respect all the mothers. My mother will wail for me. Finally Kaika's wishes have come true! Oh, Kaika!" Rama fainted.

Lakshmana is agitated. "Is Rama going to die in grief?' Unable to decide whether Rama has fainted out of anger for Kaika or pined for Sita, Lakshmana slowly and secretly changed his posture from bending to sitting. He felt that he had regained his life. He soothed his aching back.

Rama recovered from his faint with a jerk and opened his eyes. Lakshmana bounced up like a ball and bowed again as usual.

Confused and embarrassed that Lakshmana might have noticed his falling asleep, Rama tried unsuccessfully to forcibly open his sleepy eyes and look *serenely*.

Ashamed that his brother might have noticed him sitting down, Lakshmana felt repentant, 'Oh, I sat in front of my elder brother!'

Rama slipped soon from the fainting spell into grief.

"Lakshmana! Are there any other unfortunate people like me? I don't know how many sins I have committed! The kingdom is lost, our father is dead, friends and relatives are all far away and I am living this difficult life in the forest. To add it, now this separation from my wife! Alas! How many difficulties I have!...One difficulty after another! Grief over grief! I don't know, how many sins I have committed in the previous births?[215] I face the consequences now. When I reach Ayodhya, what shall I tell king Janaka about Sita? How shall I enter the harem without Sita?"

Lakshmana is perplexed. "He says he will die. He spoke the usual last words. Now, why does he cry about harems and all and stop the search for Sita?" said Lakshmana's common sense, with irritation.

"Lakshmana! Alas! Why do I need even heaven without Sita?" Rama bowed head in grief. "Sita used to apply sandal wood paste to her breasts. Alas! We don't know which Rakshasa cut off those breasts into pieces and ate them away! No…No!"[216]

Lakshmana ventured to say, "Brother! Be brave. If any body causes any harm to sister-in-law, you can tear apart those wicked fellows. You are a great valorous person! Let us search for sister-in-law through out the whole forest."

"Sita! Sita! Alas! Why do I need these kingdoms…these luxuries and wealth?" Rama stood up with cries that terrified the birds.

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They walked very quickly over some distance.

At a distance, they found a broken chariot…dead mules…and a dead charioteer. Shields worn by warriors, the umbrellas of the chariot and a bow and a few arrows were found scattered. Here and there the ground was wet with blood.

Lakshmana looked at them stunned.

"Lakshmana! Two Rakshasas must have fought between themselves to eat Sita", said Rama and looked around furiously.[217]

"….what were the gods of the forest doing? At least, what was the goddess of justice doing? Who is that bold fellow who could do so much harm to me? It seems that all the gods regarded me who is the lord of all worlds and valorous - a competent fellow. I am a tender hearted person! I wish good for all the worlds![218]

These rivers, hills and all the creatures and spirits are trying to help my enemies and neglect me. Lakshmana! I will block all the worlds with my arrows and stop the movement of living creatures. If I pull the bow string up to my ear and shoot an arrow, the planets will all gather at one place in fear. The sun and the moon will be blocked out in the sea of my arrows. The fire and wind will shake. All the mountains will tremble and collapse. Rivers and lakes will evaporate and dry up. Birds, animals and insects will all be destroyed. If I throw an arrow…."

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[215] **Aranya kanda, sarga 63, sloka 4:** Rama is also feeling sorry that he has committed sins in the previous births. We will see in detail in another foot note about these sins. ★

[216] **Aranya kanda, sarga 63, sloka 8:** Mr. Gattupalli Sesha Charyulu did not write the summary of only this sloka. He simply wrote: "The meaning of this sloka is obvious." May be he did not like to talk about it. This is the honesty of the pundits! The translation of Mr. Sripada Subrahmanya Sastry gave the meaning of this sloka as follows: "Fit to be smeared with sandal wood paste mixed with *Kunkuma* (red) flower and round breasts wet with her blood…some Rakshasa must be eating them."

The poet is unable to leave Sita's 'breasts' alone even in such grief. He has to see 'breasts' even when she is in danger! ★

[217] Rama is imagining Sita in terms of pieces. It is Rama, not Rakshasas, who cuts all the limbs of Sita. ★

[218] **Aranya kanda, sarga 6, slokas 54 & 55:** Rama declared himself how good he is, how noble he is and how merciful he is! ★

Lakshmana was agitated ever since he had seen the broken chariot, the corpses and blood. He was very anxious and felt that they would get more information if they went ahead quickly. But Rama did not seem to move even one inch ahead. He was immersed in the state of insane prattling.

After walking a bit, Lakshmana searched the surroundings.

"Lakshmana!"

"Yes, brother-sir!" Lakshmana ran back.

"Look here! If I shoot this arrow in anger…I will wipe out even the trace of Rakshasas from this world. If he won't bring back my Sita with most beautiful buttocks…whoever be the lord of these worlds…" In his anger Rama forgot that he himself was the lord of these worlds. "If he won't bring my Sita to me back, the lord of this world will taste my valour. Gods do not seem to realise my valour and courage. They do not know what sort of a person Sri Ramachandra is. Just as they can not escape death and fate, they cannot escape the fire of my anger. If these lords of the worlds do not get back to me my Sita whom Rakshasas have eaten away, I will make all the worlds disorderly. I will make all the animate and inanimate beings lifeless. All the world will be broken into smaller and smaller pieces and turn into dust…Lakshmana! Let them be ready…Let all the spirits get ready for a confrontation…I, with my arrow….."[219]

"Is this *sensible* prattle?" blurted out Lakshmana's commonsense. Lakshmana is alarmed and looked in different directions. "Do you utter whatever comes to your mind?" he said angrily to his common sense. "You have to hold your tongue. What do you know how his heart is suffering? Do you think that he is a fool? He has studied many scriptures. He has many virtues! Are you so great as to find fault with him? Hold your tongue and speak", he admonished his common sense quickly.

The common sense felt a bit shy and muttered as if it had made a mistake, "Well, then! Why doesn't he search quickly? That's why I said so."

"He will search. Why won't he search?...He will…If not?...why not?...", trying to convince himself, Lakshmana stood looking at Rama's face up and down.

"Lakshmana! Why are you delaying? Tell the sun and the moon! Let them get ready! If I release this arrow…" Lakshmana found no indication of Rama's releasing his arrow.

A female deer newly in love looked at her lover, frightened. "Rama says he will destroy all the worlds! Does it mean we will be separated, my beloved!" she asked with fear.

The male deer looked proudly at her and said, "Let him! Let him destroy! Let him fell the sun and the moon! Let him break the sky! None can separate us. I'll protect you. Be bold!" He twirled his '*moustache*'.

The love of the male deer looked at him with admiration and said, "My beloved! I know you are such a hero!"

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219. Aranya kanda, sarga 64, sloka 70 & 71: Rama is saying to Lakshmana: "If the lords of the world won't get back my Sita to me who has been abducted or Sita who is killed….such a beautiful Sita….my love Sita…if they don't bring me Sita, I will destroy the world filled with animate or inanimate beings." - It is okay! But what does he mean by 'such a beautiful' Sita? What sort of beauty is it? High buttocks, breasts like palm fruits etc…- such a beauty! Poor Sita, if she becomes thin after some time due to worry and fear and if she is brought to Rama, Rama seems to quarrel with them, 'No, no. I won't accept her. Get me Sita with high buttocks! This Sita is not my Sita. My Sita should possess breasts like palm fruits.' Devendra, the king of Gods, will save his face only if Sita doesn't become thin!

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"Lakshmana! Look here! I am releasing my arrow…." Roared Rama.

Lakshmana knew it was his duty to calm down his brother whenever his anger boiled over. He at once saluted the feet of his brother and began his eulogy. "You are surely such a valorous person! You can turn the world upside down. It is not justified if a merciful and self-controlled person like you gets angry. Light is the only virtue of the sun and the moon. Motion for the wind. Tolerance for the earth. Whereas you are a personification of all virtues. If a great soul like you is unable to bear grief, think of common people? People beget grief with birth. Revered Viswamitra killed a hundred sons of revered Vasista in one day. Didn't that great soul put up with his grief? Don't the sun who gives us rains and the moon who gives us the crops of medications suffer from *Rahu*? Even such great people like Mandhata and Nala could not escape the fate ordained by gods. Don't we hear that even Devendra has good and bad days. Learned seers and sages like you never suffer from grief. We beget the fruits of our deeds. It is not possible to determine which of our actions in the previous birth were sinful and which pious. It is not possible to see their consequences directly. It is inevitable to experience them in the form of happiness and sorrow.[220] It is you who have taught all these truths to lowly creatures like me?" Rama's face began to brighten up.

Lakshmana put his hands - which he had brought into his lap absent mindedly while talking - on Rama's feet and again began eulogizing Rama, bowing his head.

"Oh, king Kosala! The kings have to punish the guilty. You are the protector and the punisher for all the worlds. But, it is not fair that you destroy all the worlds for the crime of one wicked fellow, is it? Importantly, it is not fair to kill gods and Brahmins, is it? Why would any body in the world rejoice at the misfortune that befalls the wife of Sri Rama? You have to use all your valour only against the enemies. I beg you to be patient for a while. If you can not get back my sister-in-law by your virtues and gentle means, then you can destroy all the worlds. Felling the sun and the moon, drying up the oceans, shattering the mountains…then, you can surely complete the task that you have undertaken", said Lakshmana obediently and touched the feet of his brother gently and saluted him for the hundredth time that day!

Lakshmana's words greatly pleased Rama. Moreover, a lot of affection welled up in his chest for Lakshmana - because he had saved him from the difficulty of felling the sun and the moon, drying up the oceans and destroying all the worlds! 'I declared in an emotion but what if I shot an arrow and it killed only some locust or some squirrel or just got stuck in some branches as has happened many a time in the past?... But should I withdraw so quickly?... Should I stop so much terror? No! No!'

"Lakshmana! Your words are reasonable. But my anger is increasing and subduing my natural and gentle behaviour just as the rising sun eclipses the cool moon light. May be there is no other choice but let the worlds get a taste of my valour. Here! Let me use this arrow! If I pull the bow string up to my ear…."

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[220] **Aranya kanda, sarga 66, slokas 7 & 16:** Lakshmana keeps eulogizing Rama. We cannot see directly the actions of the previous birth; they manifest in the form of happiness and grief. It is not possible to confirm whether we did these actions unless we get fruits of those actions in the form of happiness and grief - According to this, human beings get happiness and grief because of their previous birth. People don't know that they committed a particular wrong. The results are in the form of happiness and sorrow. This means, if we possess a lot of money and are happy, we have to assume, "Oh, we must have done pious deeds". If we come across people who have no money, no food, no shelter and no health, then we have to assume, "they have done sinful deeds". They too should realise, "We have done sinful deeds".

Thus, the story of Sri Rama preaches knowledge to human beings. If anybody is hungry his hunger is not satisfied and he cries, he has to tell himself thus, "Didn't Sri Ramachandra face hardships during those days?" Thus he has to remember the story of Rama and lie down with his legs tucked in and bear the pangs of hunger.

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"Please calm down! Please be kind! Please withdraw Rama's bow that will destroy all the worlds completely. If Indra does not bring Sita Devi and offer her at your feet, then, yes, certainly, but now, please, please calm down. My lord! "Lakshmana begged him trembling. The younger brother knows that his elder brother will feel happy if he does so.

Nodding his head '*serenely*', Rama lowered his bow. He looked fiercely as if he had relented only because of Lakshmana's appeal. "What you said is just, Lakshmana! I have withdrawn my action. Don't worry anymore." Then he looked around and asked Lakshmana, "Now what is our task? How can we find Sita? Think about it!"

Lakshmana looked pleased that they could now search for the sister-in-law. "This whole area is wet with blood and appears trampled. Somebody was engaged in battle here. We shall go searching along this path quickly. I believe we may find my sister-in-law."

With anger on the trees and mountains for not telling him the whereabouts of Sita, Rama walked fiercely.

They have not moved even ten steps. In the vicinity, they saw Jatayu fell like a mountain in a pool of blood with his wings cut off.

Rama looked at Jatayu angrily. "Lakshmana! This fellow must have eaten Sita. No doubt about it. This fellow is a Rakshasa. Having feasted on Sita, he is now enjoying a deep slumber. I will now destroy this evil creature heroically with my arrow." [221]

Aiming the arrow, he walked toward Jatayu. Rama had been eager for a long time to shoot an arrow and kill some one or the other. Now, he had found a creature which was lying down without any movement.

Bleeding heavily, Jatayu lifted his head with great difficulty and looked at Rama. Feeling happy that he can pass on information to Rama about Sita, he looked anxiously at him to tell him the whole thing before he gave up his body.

"Rama! You are searching for Sita. I know. Ravana has abducted Sita. I combated with him. I kicked him out of his chariot and smashed the chariot to pieces. This bow, shield and everything is his. That wicked fellow cut off my wings, feet with a sword and escaped. Ravana himself killed me. Do you also want to kill me?" He looked pathetically.

Rama was startled at the words of Jatayu. Ravana? The king of Rakshasas! A stranger! Why did he abduct Sita? Why do men abduct others' women?..Womanizing!...Lust!...Sita…a stranger…womanizer…With his head spinning, Rama fainted to the ground dropping the bow from his hand.

Rama knew that the fainting spell, as laid down in the scriptures, need not last more than the blink of an eye. He recovered from his faint at once. He looked at Jatayu as if he could not believe his words. 'Ravana! Lustful villain…Debaucher…Did he abduct Sita? Can I believe these words?'

The mutilated Jatayu was groaning in pain. Rama began to shower questions full of emotions. "Jatayu bird! You are like a father. Tell me everything that has happened. When did you see Ravana? What sort of valour does he have? Which way did he go? Where does he live? What harm had I done to him that he has taken away my wife? Tell me every thing!"[222]

Jatayu opened his eyes with great difficulty.

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[221] **Aranya kanda, sarga 67, sloka 11:** Rama does not remember the fact that Jatayu was present to protect Sita. Instead of feeling sorry for wailing with out asking Jatayu about Sita as soon as he appeared, he suspected that he was not Jatayu and he must be a Rakshasa! He is suspicious of every body and every thing!

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[222] **Aranya kanda, sarga 68, slokas 5 & 7:** Rama is asking Jatayu. "Seeing what offence of mine did Ravana abduct Sita?" He knows that Ravana is the king of Rakshasas. He knows that hostility between him and the Rakshasas is going on. He is asking innocently as if he

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"He went toward South, my son!...My energy is draining. My eyes…are closing…Don't grieve…You will get your wife back. Ravana has abducted Sita during *Vinda*. If we look at the power of that *muhurtam* (astrological time) the owner will get back his things quickly. Ravana did not realise this. Sita will not remain long with him. Don't worry, my lad![223] Ravana will perish. You with your wife….will be happy."

Rama asked eagerly again, "The chariot was apparently broken here. How did that fellow carry Sita? Tell me quickly! Don't die without telling me about it!"

"Holding her tightly in his arms…pressing her close to his body…with his hand round her waist…flying…"

Rama's head swirled around and he fainted. He got up quickly and asked, "Tell me, how he held her? Tell me again, father! Tell me quickly…"

"With his hand round her waist."

Rama fainted to the ground again with his head going round and round. Ravana is infuriated with Jatayu, for he destroyed Ravana's chariot. He would have sat Sita in the chariot, if it had not broken? She would have sat at a distant from that vile fellow. Why should this man destroy the chariot?

"Father! Where did Sita sit first in the chariot?"

"On Ravana's lap"

"Oh!" The swirling of Rama's head again! Fainting as per scriptures!

Rama's entire anger turned toward Sita. 'All the while, I was grieving very kindly that wild animals had eaten Sita and the Rakshasas had killed her…but now, look at what has happened….another man….that too Ravana…a very lustful man….holding her tight against his body…..Huh! did she heed, when I told her not to come? On par with men…Royal lady in the forests…! How much safer she would have been in the harems!...Did she listen to me when I told her not to come?....How much I told her?'

"Father! Tell me quickly? What was Sita doing then? How did her face look to you? She was very sad, wasn't she? She was afraid, wasn't she? Please, quick…."

Jatayu's body is suffering with the pain of death.

"Tell me…Tell me…Tell me quickly… How was Sita's face?"[224]

Jatayu is unable to open his eyes.

Rama began wailing. "Alas! Can anybody be as unfortunate as I! How many hardships I have faced! I lost the kingdom. My father passed away. My wife passed away. Now, this Jatayu is also almost dead. Even the god of fire would have burned in so much sorrow!" Rama wailed for a while about the misery of Agni.

He suddenly remembered his sexual separation.

"Lakshmana! There is separation between me and Sita…To quench the fire of this sexual separation I will take a dip in the ocean. May be the ocean too will evaporate, unable to bear this heat! Alas!" Rama wailed for a while about

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→ does not know any thing. "What did I do?" When Surpanakha talked to Ravana, she had given him all the details: that 'Ravana was the king of Rakshasas', that he was the son of Vipravasu, that he was her brother … and so on. But, Rama is now asking, "Where does Ravana live?" Have all the sages been yelling all these days about 'killing Ravana! Killing Ravana' without knowing 'what the country of Ravana is?' ★

223. Aranya kanda, sarga 68, sloka 18: This means, if Rama gets back Sita, it would be the greatness of 'Vinda' time and there is nothing great about Rama! If an article is lost during the Vinda time, it will any way come back, won't it? ★

224. Aranya kanda, sarga 68, sloka 18: "While Ravana was abducting, how did that soul-captivating, moon-like face appear?" - "While Sri Rama was asking Jatayu with salutation, "Tell me! Tell me!". Jatayu gave up his mortal coil".

Rama should assume that Sita must have been grieving a lot, shouldn't he? Why should he have any doubt, "How was Sita?" This means, he suspects whether she was grieving or not. ★

the misery of the ocean.

Suffering from the pain of death, Jatayu put his head down and stretched his legs.

Rama's grief increased a lot. "Lakshmana! Jatayu is like our father, you know! Having lived in this forest for a long time, he laid down his life for my sake. Alas! I was not so saddened even at the loss of Sita! My lad!...Make arrangements for the pyre. I will perform the last rites. My heart is distressed in sorrow, you know!" Rama sat sorrowing.

Lakshmana moved swiftly and began to stack up the dried sticks.

Rama's heart was burning, imagining Sita in the arms of Ravana. Did she heed when I told her not to come?...Did she let Lakshmana guard her? Did that villain force his way into the cottage to abduct her?....She is a great devoted wife, isn't she?...She could have stopped him!...She could have burnt that base fellow into ashes with her stare!...Did she go with him willingly?'

Rama is shocked. 'What sort of thoughts are these? Sita, a great devoted wife! Does she desire another man?...Why this doubt?'

"Brother! The pyre is ready"

"Oh, father! Alas!" Rama rose enthusiastically to perform the last rites.

Lakshmana has piled up dry sticks and tree branches around the corpse of Jatayu. He has also lit a fire. Crying profusely, Rama put a burning stick to the funeral pyre. "Oh, king of the birds! I am consecrating you to the fire. Because Sri Rama is performing these rites for you, you will attain the higher worlds just like the people who have performed great religious rituals, done penance or given away their riches in charity, I am ordering you to go to the pious worlds."[225]

Then Rama and Lakshmana took out their bows, killed deer and prepared meat to offer food to the departed soul of Jatayu.

Rama offered the meat with a ritual rendering of chants usually uttered by Brahmins to facilitate the ascent of departed souls to heaven. Then they offered water in the Godavari. Rama forgot all his sorrow as he performed these rites.

When the whole ceremony was over, Lakshmana bowed and asked, "Brother, sir! What is your command?"

Rama looked around in all directions. It didn't strike him what order to give.

Carrying Sita, Ravana was flying in Rama's mind.

Hostility with Ravana…after so long a time!

He had been dreaming since his childhood, "Killing Ravana! Killing Ravana!" Though he had promised sages about ten or twelve years ago to kill all the Rakshasas, but now battle…With Ravana! How big an army is needed? I… alone…and this Lakshmana…All the sages laud me! If all the sages join the army…? If I conquer Ravana's kingdom… If I kill that wicked fellow with Rama's arrow? How big an infamy it is that another man has abducted Sita!...Will the world accept?...Sita's chastity? Will the world believe?'

Rama is struggling with thoughts. He has not given any order to Lakshmana. Nodding his head, he walked with big strides. Behind him, strode Lakshmana! ★

[Translation: Text - **Ari Sitaramayya.**
Footnotes: B.R.Bapuji]

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[225] **Aranya kanda, sarga 87, sloka 30 & 31:** "Duly permitted by me, ascend you to unsurpassed realms", says Rama. He laments that he has committed many sins and hence suffered hardships. Such a person sends others to 'unsurpassed realms'! Every thing is in the reverse order, as Lakshmana's commonsense said! ★

Link-5

Between the 5th Story and the 6th Story

[The **5th** story ended with the passing away of Jatayu after informing Rama that Ravana had abducted Sita. The **6th** story begins with the description of Sri Rama's *manmadhaavastha*, the state of cupidity. This is the link between those two stories.]

After performing the funeral rites for Jatayu, Rama started towards the North in search of Sita, while Lakshmana walked in the front. (*While Ravana went towards South, the search is towards North!*)

Walking about six miles (from Janasthana) through the dense forest filled with huge trees, bamboo bushes, uphill and downhill, elephants and lions and crossing the *Dandakaranya*, they entered *Krowncharanya*. Passing through this forest which is full of wild animals and snakes, they saw a very deep dark cave in the vicinity of sage Matanga's hermitage. Near that cave they saw a ferocious Rakshasa. She had a huge belly, sharp and long pointed teeth, a vulgar look, thick skin, dishevelled and grass-like hair, an ugly face….*why waste a thousand words?* In short, she has all the qualities of a Rakshasa. Coming close to Lakshmana, whom she saw first, she embraced him and said, "Come on, let us enjoy ourselves!"

"O hero! My name is Ayomukhi. You appeal to me. Let us saunter in this forest!" she said. Lakshmana became furious, swiftly took out his sword and cut off Ayomukhi's nose, ears and breasts. (*Without the command of his brother!*) Ayomukhi ran away crying.

Lakshmana and Rama went ahead. Lakshmana said with hesitation, "Sri Rama! My left shoulder is quivering. I suspect bad omen. (*Strange! Rama's shoulder was not quivering*). The *Vanjulaka* bird was cooing as if wishing us victory. (A combination of good and bad omens).

Meanwhile, they heard a big noise as if the sky broke and fell down. They saw a Rakshasa who sat like a big mountain in bushes. He had no head, no legs. His face was in his belly. An eye on the chest. He was dark like a black hill with thick hair. His sharp and pointed teeth were like swords. That single eye was shining like a fire pit. His hands were a *yoojana* long.[226]

With his hands, that fellow grabbed birds, deer, bears, elephants and lions. (*Good fellow, he was not partial!*) His name was Kabandha.

By the time Rama and Lakshmana saw him, Kabandha caught hold of both of them and pressed them towards him. (*Is this a new ordeal,* ***as if a palm fruit had fallen on the suffering fox****? Perhaps, Rama might abuse Kaika again!*)

Rama was not frightened (*what a lie!*) Lakshmana was frightened (*A bigger lie!*) and said, "Sri Ramachandra! Offer me to Kabandha and escape! You will soon get your wife. You will also get the kingdom earned by our father. But don't ever forget me."

Rama gave him courage, "O hero! Don't fear!" (*Since Lakshmana gave him courage a while ago, it seems Rama is going to repay his debt by giving courage to Lakshmana now!*)

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226. Some people said, both *yoojana* and *aamadaa* (eight miles) are identical. Others said, 'They are not identical. Yoojana is yoojana, aamada is aamada.' Yet others said, yoojana means 800 miles. As I thought it was some thing that we couldn't ascertain, I gave up the task of explaining the number of miles per yoojana!)

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Like the roaring of the cloud, Kabandha laughed and said, "Oh, you are a fatty! You look like bulls! (*Kabandha used the term 'Vrushabha'. Vrushabha means 'bulls'!*) Oh, you have swords and bows too! What have you to do in this forest? Why have you come here?...*Hunger is burning me*." He examined both of them. (*Looking at the smoothness of Rama's belly, the shine of his fat shoulders and brightness of his high buttocks, Kabandha might have developed fondness to bite him like a* ***Bure*** *cake.*) With *tiny smiles* he said, "So, you can no longer escape from my hands."

Rama's face turned pale.[227]

"O real valorous Lakshmana! (*Rama is conceding that it is Lakshmana who has real valour!*) In addition to all the sufferings we already faced, we face this threat to our life! Alas! All the living beings have to abide by their time! God does not show any discrimination while awarding death, you know! Whether it is heroes, warriors or people well versed in using arms and weapons. Once their last days approach they ought to collapse like bridges made of sand, oughtn't they? (*Sand bridges! Who else would build such bridges except contractors? Even at that time!*) Lakshmana, Destiny determines every thing!" sighed Rama.

Kabandha found it amusing. Instead of taking them out from his hand and putting them into his mouth, he began to converse with them. (*Is it because he wanted to eat them after teasing them for a while?*) He said laughing, "Are you scared? You are heroes, aren't you? Then why do you talk of destiny and god? That god only gave you to me. This is the gift of destiny. Do you know! (*Well said, Kabandha!*)[228]

Lakshmana recovered quickly and gathered courage. "Sri Rama! The Rakshasa is going to eat us in the blink of an eye, you see! Let us quickly cut off his hands", Lakshmana *preached him the task.*

"What, will you cut off my hands?" Kabandha got wild and was about to put both of them in his mouth (*Kabandha! You should have done this a long time ago, shouldn't you?*)

Both of his hands were cut off and fell to the ground. (*Oh, my god! Look what happens if you delay things!*)

The Rakshasa cried loudly. Amidst those cries, he shouted, "Who are you?"

Pointing out his brother, Lakshmana said calmly, "This great man is the son of king Dasaratha. (*Isn't he also a son?*) I am the younger brother of this great man. (*Little great man!*) A Rakshasa has abducted this great man's wife. We have come this side searching for that noble lady. (*You have fixed us!*) Tell us about you. Who are you? What is this face in the belly?" (*It is crazy!*) Lakshmana asked Kabandha. (*It seems Rama was unable to utter any thing. Why doesn't he open his mouth?*)

Kabandha felt very happy and stopped his cries. Moreover, he was delighted, "Heroes! You have cut off my hands. It is my fortune."

"I'll tell you my story, listen!", he ignored Lakshmana who was talking to him and started telling Rama. "Rama! In the past, I used to be a

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227. Aranya kanda, sarga 69, sloka 47: "Listening to the words of wicked Kabandha, Sri Rama with his withered face, said to Lakshmana thus." Why 'withered face' in the case of a hero? How long can a gathered courage remain? At the beginning of this story, when sage Valmiki asked, "Is there any great man in this world?", sage Narada, in his description of Rama, said, "He (Rama) never loses courage." But, this quality is found reversed. We never find courage in Rama's behaviour. ★

228. Aranya kanda, sarga 70, sloka 2: "You the best Kshatriyas, you need not be afraid of me. God himself gave you - who are going to give up your bodies - to me as food." Look, Kabandha is a logician! Yes, Kabandha! God has given you these two people. Eat both of them. They kill every body. But, if you find Sita, you should not kill her. She does not kill any one. Sit her carefully on your shoulder, take her to her country and deliver her to her mother. ★

very handsome like Indra and the moon. (*We can't believe, you see!*) Me, who was so handsome, used to frighten sages with this ugly appearance. (*What fun is there in playing with sages? If he wants, he should play with lions!*) When a sage named *Sthuula sirassu* was gathering fruits, I frightened him and grabbed the fruits from him. (*Finally, what he did was 'grab fruits!' Does frightening mean this much?*) Then that sage got angry and cursed me, 'All right! You will have this ugly appearance forever.' I was frightened and asked him for some relief from the curse. Then the sage said, "You will get back your handsome appearance again when Sri Rama cuts off your shoulders and cremates you." (*But, Rama cut off only one hand, didn't he?*)

Kabandha, after narrating this, told them another kind of story immediately. "Rama! The name of my father is 'Danu'. I performed great penance, acquired longevity due to Brahma's boon and then waged a battle against Indra, due to my arrogance. (*It seems all Rakshasas studied in the same school! All fellows attack only Indra, we don't know why!*) Indra hit me on my navel with his thunderbolt. My head and legs pressed into my body and I became like a lump. Indra did not kill me since Brahma had granted me long life. Then I asked Indra, "I have turned into this shape. How can I gather my food? If I don't live longer, Brahma's boon will become a lie, won't it?" (*Great Logic!*) Indra gave me hands which are about one yojana length, gave an eye in the belly and also *needle like teeth*. (*Oh, all acts of Indra are like this!*) 'You will go to heaven when Sri Rama cuts off your shoulders!' said Indra and went away to heaven.[229] Since then, I have been grabbing everything with these hands and eating my food. Rama! I have been waiting for you." (*To grab Rama as well?*) Thus Kabandha finished the second story. (*Enjoy whichever story you like, it is up to you.*) After narrating both the stories Kabandha looked at Rama and gave him hope. "Rama! I will help you after you cremate me. I will tell you about a friend who can help you."

Rama felt as if he regained his life as soon as he had heard Kabandha's words. "All right, we will cremate you. We will bring dried trees which the elephants have felled, dig a big pit and cremate you in it. (*Does he have to get trees or dig the pit? It is enough if he simply talks about it, isn't it?*) When my brother and I went into the forest Ravana abducted my wife. I came to know his name. I do not know where he lives and what sort of valour he has. Kabandha! I have always helped others, you know! (*It is appropriate to say 'helped the sages'*). Now I am immersed in sorrow since I have no one to help me and protect me. You have to be merciful to me. Tell me all the details of Ravana if you know!" Rama hurried him.[230]

Kabandha began to narrate his story very enthusiastically. "Rama! I used to possess celestial knowledge but I lost it after this curse. I will not get back my original appearance and knowledge unless I am cremated. You have to cremate me before the sun sets. (*Lakshmana must have bounced up like a ball to drag trees.*) After I get back my knowledge, I will tell you about the person who knows about Ravana. There is nothing which he does not know! (*So, he is a greater man than Rama! Pity Rama is bearing this insult without opening his mouth. Well, who might be that gentleman! If we help*

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229. Aranya kanda, sarga 71: The first story is up to 7 slokas. From the next sloka, the second story begins. It is irrelevant to us how two stories have come there. In both the stories, we find glorification of Sri Rama and the sages while there is a degradation of the Rakshasas. This is mportant for us.
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230. Aranya kanda, sarga 71, sloka 24: "Please be merciful to us - who are interested in helping others, who are stricken with grief, who have no protectors and who are thus searching for Sita." Who would keep quiet if the poet maligned his character - It was only Rama who kept quiet because he is a god.
★

Lakshmana by dragging the trees quickly, we can find out quickly who that gentleman is.) He will tell you all the details about Ravana. So, *burn me* quickly." Kabandha was eager to *get burnt.*

Lakshmana got everything ready. He pushed Kabandha into the pit near the mountain and called his brother. Then, he burnt the pyre.

After some time Kabandha rose out of the ashes with a very handsome appearance. He wore silk garments, flower garlands and even rings. He rose up from the pyre on a glittering chariot driven by a swan (*What a mentality to use swans even for driving chariots!*) He rose up from the pyre. Floating in the sky along with that chariot, he said, "Rama! I told you I would show you the way to search for Sita. Listen!" He began, "There are six ways of tackling things in this world: *Sandhi, Vigraham, Yanam, Asanam, Dwaidibhavam and Samaasryam.* One who is in difficulties ought to make friends with another fellow who is also in difficulties. (*Samaasryam* = Taking the help of people with similar conditions.) Since you have lost your wife, you are in a pathetic condition. Similarly a *Vanara* king called Sugriva is in exile and he is in a miserable condition. Sugriva is the sun of a Vanara called Riksharajas. He was *Aurasa putra* of Bhaskara, the sun. Sugriva is valorous, powerful, truthful, wise, courageous, great, meritorious, and capable (*so many greats?*) Such a younger brother was banished from the kingdom by Vali, son of Indra. Now Sugriva is spending his time in terror along with four companions on Rishyamuka Mountain near the bank of the Pampa Lake.[231] (*Courageous man became coward!*)

"Rama! You should not treat Sugriva as an inferior person because he is a Vanara. He is the head of the Vanaras. (*Coward head!*) He is seeking help of others. He is not of the sort who forgets the help given to him. Go quickly and make friends with Sugriva with fire and weapons as your witnesses! He will help you to search for your wife. He knows everything about the Rakshasas. He will command his army to search for Sita in the hills and valleys. (*Oh, still we have to search! My goodness! I thought he would get her without a search!*) He will get your wife to you even if she is in the nether world; but you have to do Sugriva's work! Rama! You can do it. Sugriva will not stop helping you whether your action is successful or not. (*Oh, this means, it is also possible that Rama's action will be unsuccessful! Then if it doesn't succeed and Sugriva doesn't become*

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231. Aranya kanda, sarga 72, sloka 21: "Sugriva is the son of Riksharajas. (*Riksharajas putraha*). He was *Aurasa putra* of the Sun. (*bhaaskarasyaurasyaputroo*).

Sloka 11 in this sarga: "Vali, who is the son of Indra and the older brother of Sugriva exiled Sugriva from the kingdom."

Vali and Sugriva are brothers. There is no clarity whether they are sons of the same mother or not. Let us suppose both have the same mother and father is not the same. Riksharajas was the man (husband) whom the mother of these sons had married. He was a Vanara. These sons, however, were not born due to this father. Vali was born due to Indra and Sugriva due to the Sun. These were not secret relationships. This was the practice in the system of pairing marriage before the emergence of the rule of 'loyalty' or 'conjugal fidelity' to the husband. Since this woman was the wife of Riksharajas, he would be the father of the children to whom she gave birth.

Children whom a woman conceived were her own children irrespective of the nature of the relationship (either due to the husband or some other man) out of which the children were born.

Kshetraja putra = A son of a man born to his wife due to another man. *Kshetra* = wife. Children born to that wife are *Kshetrajas*. Vali and Sugriva were Kshetraja sons of Rikshajarajas. *Aurasa putra* = A son of a man born to his wife or any woman other than the wife due to him. Vali and Sugriva wee Aurasa putras of Indra and the Sun respectively. Although the actual fathers of Vali and Sugriva were gods, the brothers became Vanaras like their mother. ★

king and if Sugriva doesn't get the army under his control, how will he help in searching for Sita? 'He will help you even if your action fails' says Kabandha! - After wearing those jewels and garments, Kabandha had turned into a blatant liar!) Rama! Don't grieve! Whatever is destined to will happen. It is not possible to change destiny. (*Oh, finally, this is what he concluded!*) Now, listen, I will tell you the way to go the Rishyamuka Mountain.

You have to pass all the trees towards the North. (*Won't there be trees after that?*) There you will find another forest. There you will find fruits on all the trees. After crossing that forest as well, you will see the Pampa Lake. That lake looks very beautiful with various kinds of flowers. The swans and *Krowncha* birds (crane) which gambol in that lake do not know what fear is. They won't be afraid of you. They look like lumps of *ghee*. Shoot them with arrows and eat them! (*At least then they will know what fear is and learn to hide themselves.*) There will be very good fish and prawns in that lake. Lakshmana will shoot them with arrows, prick them with an iron stake, cook them on fire and give them to you. Rama! Eat well.[232]

(*Why won't he eat? That's all right! This 'sage Rama' also had brought iron stakes with him! It seems there is a dearth of a frying pan! Or it too might be there!*) There, fat pigs roam around like bulls.[233]

On the bank of the Pampa Lake, disciples of sage Matanga are engaged in Yoga. When they were fetching fruits for their teacher, they sweated due to the weight of the fruits and the drops of their sweat fell on the trees due to the wind and they turned into flowers.[234]

Therefore flowers in that forest don't wither. (*Let's agree they don't wither! But, won't the sweat-flowers smell of sweat? If we go towards Pampa, we shouldn't touch those flowers!*) They don't fall from the trees. There, an old woman-hermit, called Sabari, has been serving the sages for a long time and is long lived (*chiranjeevini*). Rama! That Sabari will go to heaven after she sees you.

There is the Rishyamuka Mountain to the East of Pampa. Brahma gave it a character in the past. Those who had committed sins cannot climb that mountain. If a sinner who has given up his race and customs, climbs it (*so, he too can climb!*), Rakshasas will wake him up while he sleeps and *beat* him *to death*. (*Well, how can the Rakshasas, who are sinners, climb that*

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232. Aranya kanda, sarga 73, slokas 15 & 16:

"Rama! Lakshmana will shoot arrows, kill the best *Gandu* fish, *Sora* fish, prawns in the Pampa lake; remove their skin and wings; pierce the iron stake into them, roast them over the fire, remove their bones and offer it to you with reverence." Said Kabandha. So, if someone writes stories titled, "Rama and Prawns" or "Rama and Fish fry", it won't be contrary to Valmiki. Any way, Lakshmana will cook the fish curry after going to Pampa. ★

233. Aranya kanda, sarga 73, slokas 18 & 19: "In Pampa, you will see pigs which are very fat... roar like bulls." The poet compared Rama and Lakshmana with bulls and pigs with bulls. Well, we can't say it is wrong. Then, we can see things like this:

Rama and Lakshmana = Bulls.
Pigs = Bulls.
Bulls = Bulls.
Rama and Lakshmana = Pigs.

Any way, we have the *Varaaha avatara*, (incarnation in the form of a pig) don't we? ★

234. Aranya kanda, sarga 73, slokas 13 to15: "Owing to the influence of the penance of sages, the drops of the sweat turned into flowers." It is nice if flowers blossom out of sweat. But not out of the sweat of sages but of labourers. The sweat of labourers alone will blossom into flowers, fruits and crops. ★

mountain?) Whatever one dreams on that mountain will come true after he woke up. If one gets money in the dream, he will really get it after he wakes up.[235] (*So, it will be good if all people put their beds there on that mountain*). There are many snakes on that mountain. Snakes alone protect it. (*Oh hell! How can we have beds there?*) Rama! Fat elephants, bears and big lions roam very freely throughout the forest. You will forget your grief on seeing them. (*Immersed in fear?*) By the miracle of sage Matanga, those wild animals don't spoil the hermitage.

Sugriva is living in a cave on that mountain. Go and take his help. Your work will be done. Now, I will go" Kabandha flew away happily. (*So, until then he was looking into the sky, stretching his neck!*)[236]

Following Kabandha's instructions, Rama walked forward, *staying behind* Lakshmana. One night passed. In the dawn, they saw Sabari's cottage on the northern bank of Pampa.

Sabari is an old woman who performed fierce penance involving *yogic* exercises. Seeing the guests, Sabari smilingly offered them water to wash their feet and observed all the customs. (*Like hell! Guests even in the dense forest!*)

Rama sat and began to enquire of the well being of that old woman nodding his head serenely. "Is your penance improving? Have you conquered lust and all that (*kaamaadulu*)? (*Asking this of such an old woman!*) Are you without anger? Have you controlled your hunger? (*Of course, I haven't. I am going to Pampa for prawns!*) With vows fulfilled, is your mind happy? Has your worship to the spiritual teachers been fulfilled?" Thus he asked about herself.

Sabari folded her hands with reverence. "Rama! My penance is fulfilled after seeing you. Only now, all my worship to the spiritual teacher is fulfilled. My life is blessed with fortune. With your kindness and mercy I will attain heaven without rebirth. Rama! When you were at Chitrakuta all the spiritual teachers whom I served went to heaven in airplanes. My teachers told me, 'Sabari! Sri Rama will come to this hermitage. Serve him. With his visit (*darshan*) you will attain imperishable heaven. (*So, all this devotion of Sabari is for the sake of heaven! Oh, I see!*) Rama! I have gathered and stored all the fruits available in these surroundings for you." (*Rama lived in Chitrakuta at least about thirteen years ago. So she had been storing the fruits since then!*)

Unconcerned with the fruits bundle, (*the poet did not write that he ate the fruits*), Rama said "Sabari! I have heard of the miracles of sage Matanga through Kabandha. Now, I would like to see them."

Sabari took Lakshmana and Rama to Matanga's hermitage. "Rama! Sage Matanga performed sacrifices here only. As he was unable to go to the rivers due to old age, he called the rivers and oceans to this place. Since then they have been here. (*He could call rivers and oceans but could not overcome old age!*) Look, those oceans and rivers over there! (*Rivers and oceans in the backyard of the hermitage!*)

Look at my spiritual teacher's upper garments are still wet on the trees. (*So much oily muck!*) Rama! You have seen the entire hermitage. I am thinking of going to serve my spiritual teacher, leaving this worn out body."

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235. Aranya kanda, sarga 73, slokas 32 & 33: "Rama! If a man got money in his dream while he was sleeping on that mountain, he will get it after he wakes up". Lives of sages and pious people too revolve around 'money'! Why do these fellows want 'money'? A Gandharva, who flies in the sky, too talks about money!) ★

236. Of course Kabandha got jewels and all, along with his new appearance but what new knowledge did he gain? He had told Rama about Sugriva in the beginning. The same he told him again later. He didn't tell him a single word about Ravana. *Drowning Rama in the dreams of fish*, he escaped tactfully. ★

She saluted Rama with reverence.

Rama serenely approved. "You have worshipped with devotion. Go to the world that you want!"

The old Sabari jumped into the fire pit, immediately rose out of the pyre with ornaments and silk garments and went into the skies. (*The result of penance of all these years is - ornaments, silk garments and heaven! There again, serve the spiritual teachers!*)

Rama and Lakshmana resumed walking. Rama said to Lakshmana, "Lakshmana! We have seen the great miraculous hermitage of sage Matanga. We have witnessed deer and lions living without enmity.[237] We took a bath in the seven seas located in the hermitage and offered water to the reverend forefathers. Now, harm will vanish and good things will happen. Now my heart is very happy. We have to quickly meet the Vanara king Sugriva."

Lakshmana hurried more. "Yes, Sri Rama! We have to go quickly" He increased his pace.[238]

Both of them walked briskly and reached lake Pampa. They saw the Rishyamuka mountain.

Rama said, "Lakshmana! Kabandha said that Sugriva is on that Mountain over there, didn't he? You go to him first." Immediately, shedding tears he wailed, "Lakshmana! Having lost the kingdom, I have become helpless and pathetic. To forget that grief, I have diverted my mind on to Sita. How can I live without Sita?"[239]

He saw the beauty of the forest around him. He saw the beauty of the Pampa lake. Rama immersed himself in the *ocean of suffering of the cupid.* ★

[Translation: **B.R. Bapuji**]

Here ends 'Aranya kanda'.

Next begins 'Kishkindha kanda'.

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[237] **Aranya kanda, sarga 75, sloka 3:** Rama says, "Lakshmana! We have seen the great man's hermitage where there were deer and lions living together with confidence and without quarrelling each other." Lions and deer lived together, he says! Then why can't the sages and Rakshasas live together without quarrels? Why do these sages play so many tricks to get Rakshasas killed? Why do they shout, "Amen! Amen!" when a Rakshasa is harmed? Why do they resolve to destroy the race of Rakshasas totally? Fake morals are always like this! ★

[238] **Aranya kanda, sarga 75, slokas 8 & 9:** "I am eager to see Sugriva quickly" said Rama. In response, Lakshmana said, "We will go there quickly. My heart too is eager." See later how quickly Rama goes to Sugriva! ★

[239] **Aranya kanda, sarga 75, sloka 28:** "Lakshmana! Having lost the kingdom I have become helpless and pathetic. To forget that pathos, I have concentrated my mind on Sita. How can I live without her?" says Rama. What reason does Rama give for concentrating his mind on Sita? In order to forget the grief because he has lost the kingdom and become helpless and pathetic. This is why he has diverted his mind toward Sita! Had he not lost the kingdom, this gentleman would not have lamented even if some man had abducted Sita! Since this is the truth, *it came out of* Rama's *mouth*! The poet is very sympathetic to Rama since he was suffering with desire for sex (*madanaabhipiidita*). ★

Story-6

The Sex Pundit

Carrying the fragrance of water lilies, the wind is roaming throughout the forest. The *Pampa* Lake is so wide that it seemed to have occupied the whole earth. Many creepers of *Jaji, Punnaga, Vasanthi, Nagamallika, Nilakosa, Purnika, Sirisha, Kara vira* — intertwining and joining together — looked as though they have forgotten to return and gathered round Pampa saying, "Come along friends, let us see Pampa."

The water in the Pampa is still, not flowing in any direction. Pampa is like a chariot of flowers with creepers that blossomed along the banks; red lotuses, white lotuses, black lilies, fragrant flowers blossomed abundantly on the waters. Pampa is like a jewel carpet shining with gems and crystals with the reflection of a myriad coloured flower rays on the waters. Crimson lotuses, reddened in the waters, are shining like an orb each on a wave just as a solar disc reflects on the waves. Swans, water fowls and a large variety of birds are swimming in the waters in sport, scattering the reflecting sun rays on the waves and eating the flowers by going into the centre.

When the wind abated on the water and the ripples became fewer making it still, fish came out swimming from their hiding till then in the layers of the water.

On the sand heaps in the lake, there were bushes fully blossomed here and there. Filled with *Satapatra* birds, *Arjuna* birds, *Sarasa* birds and parrots, the bushes are rustling. On the sand heaps, fragrant grass grew tall and formed into bushes. Animals are coming out fearfully from the groves, drinking water in the nearby pools and returning. The creepers crawling on the banks of the lake with blossoms, flowers swinging on the entire water, swinging birds, bushes on the sand heaps and grass shrubs are all reflecting on the water and another Pampa is appearing in the bed of Pampa.

Neredu trees, *Moradi* trees, *Panasa* trees, *Karnikari* trees, *Tommiravi* trees, Mango trees, *Tilakas, Nili Ashokas, Kadambas, Rakta chandanas, Spandanas* and many varieties of big trees, which came to see the beauty of Pampa seemed taking rest occupying the surroundings extensively. The branches of the trees extended all around and looked like mountains that sprout from the earth and are like clouds floating in the sky. With the creepers in blossom surrounding them, trees appeared to be wearing floral garlands.

The wind is sporting with the trees. It is moving the branches and running away. It is disturbing the carpenter bees from the flowers.

The fringes of the branches were swaying and getting entangled in the opposite branches and those branches and bunches of flowers are deeply embracing one another. Flowers squeezed in the embrace of the branches getting suffocated, swooned and are dropping with a rippling sound. The sporting wind was carrying away the falling flowers, making flower clouds. Those flowers which escaped the wind fell down and the entire ground became a bed of flowers. The wind is shaking the branches, dropping down the flowers, scattering the carpenter bees, dashing into the trees, laughing and running away with new fragrances. The trees are conversing with the noise of the bees and chirping of birds.

"*Vakula*! How well you have blossomed today!" said *Uddalaka*.

"Oh! Is it better than you? See for yourself, how abundantly you have blossomed!" — Vakula.

"Yes, Uddalaka has blossomed better" — *Parijata*.

"Well, I don't know how I have blossomed. This wind is making my life uncomfortable with tickles."

"See! Some strangers are coming, it seems!" —*Jaji*.

Walking under the trees is like walking under the blue sky covered with thick clouds.

Lakshmana is looking anxiously at the Rishyamuka Mountain which is at a distance and wondered if somebody might appear in sight. Rama is observing Pampa and the surroundings.

The breeze from the lake is pleasant and fragrant. The entire forest is *raining flowers* like early showers. Cuckoos are cooing without rest. They are flying along with their cooing. Peacocks trying to unfold the feathers of their tails got them entangled in the branches and so are jumping down under the trees. Their feather tails are shining with glitters like gem porches leading to some mysterious beautiful lands.

Rama said *serenely*, "Lakshmana!...This Pampa lake...These cuckoos...peacocks...the fragrance...cool breezes are exciting lust! This is the spring season, you know!" Rama recollected all the descriptions of the spring season.

Lakshmana, without shifting his attention from the Rishyamuka mountain, conceded it to be spring, saying, "Yes, sir!"

"Lakshmana! I lost the kingdom and I am already in a pathetic condition. Shifting my attention to Sita, I am able to live. Now, how can I live without Sita? The glory of this spring season brings me misery in the absence of Sita."

"Yes, brother sir, it causes misery."

"See the beauty of this Pampa Lake! It brings pleasure, even in this deep sorrow."

"Yes, sir, it brings pleasure"

Lakshmana is worried that he may not be able to ascend the Rishyamuka. There is no path leading up in sight anywhere. There are very thick trees and bushes there! Except snakes, even animals cannot tread there. Red flower trees blossomed richly here and there around the mountain and are swinging in the air. It appeared as though the fringes of the mountains had caught fire and burnt brightly *stretching their tongues of fire*. It seemed impossible to reach the top of the mountain except by flying, if one could get wings through meditation.

"Lakshmana! See creepers crawl up the tops of trees and embrace them throughout the forest. See all hills turn into heaps of flowers! See how abundantly that *Ketaki* plants entwining the Banyan tree, have blossomed! Alas! The separation of Sita during this spring afflicts me a lot...See those water fowls! How they swim on the lake! Just hearing the chirping of water birds Sita would call me and point towards them in mirth!" Rama stopped saying as if turning introvert and plunged into thought.

Sita in the arms of another man....that cruel fellow....lustful fellow...would she be despairing? A great virtuous woman...she could burn him to ashes?...Doesn't she have the power!....Oh! No!...But then?...Is she vexed of this forest life and hardships? Will she yield to royal luxuries...comforts? Did she go willingly?...What is this wicked thought?... What thoughts are these in the mind, like snakes encircling...?

She came to the forest life willingly! She expressed so much gladness during her stay in the forest!...Occasionally...when tired of over work, she used to feel a bit disappointed...But the next moment she used to feel shy a lot! She used to regret. She used to clamour always to serve him and the sages. She used to move hesitantly lest she slipped in her duty. She used to dream to become a great devoted wife, listening to many stories and histories of devoted wives...would she forget all that? Would she forget the entire past?...No, it will not be so. Never will it be so. Another man might abduct Sita by force...Nothing more than that will happen!

Rama's mind relieved of a great burden, became lighter than a tiny piece of cotton. He looked around with a smile. The beauty of spring increased ten fold. All the branches of the trees became cuckoos and are cooing. Fragrance of sandal wood is floating in the air. Humble bees are going round the bushes humming. Abundantly blossomed trees appeared like men decorated with silk clothes and ornaments. On the '*Gurivinda*' bushes around Pampa, seeds in bunches are dangling. " Lakshmana! Sita used to feel glad when forests blossomed. These crimson tender shoots remind me of the lips of Sita…Those lovely eyelids…. smooth cheeks….soft locks… Alas…The spring teases me reminding me of all those."

If Sita were present and went about in these forests, she would have really been glad to see Pampa. She would have gone round all those 'Guruvinda" bushes and plucked all those seeds, and collect them in her lap. She would have put those yellow stem flowers into her month and suck out the honey. She would have tied all the fresh flowers with a creeper vine and put that round the neck of Rama.

Sita is a bit afraid of '*Mogali*' bushes! She once said, "They say black cobras lurk in the Mogali bushes!"

"Why only in Mogali bushes? They lurk even in harems", said Rama, with the thoughts about Kaika.

Sita was a bit surprised and said, "In harems too?"

Rama would correct himself and said *serenely*, "May be or may not be." Sita would laugh.

Rama sighed and said, "Lakshamana! How cruel the spring season is! My darling too is cruel!" He sighed once again!

"Brother, sir!….The path upto the top of the mountain…Nowhere…"

"Oh, I am in despair as it is…Look there…How that cuckoo mocks me!"

Lakshmana looked that side annoyed.

The cuckoo stretched its neck and cooed in some direction. "It is not mocking you, brother-sir! It is in rapture on the arrival of spring!" Lakshmana turned a bit poetic in the breeze of spring.

"Is it so, Lakshmana?"

"Yes, it is so! Brother! It is so!"

"Oh!…See that peacock under the sandal tree frolicking with male passion…Having its mate by its side, it is heckling me, who has no wife. No body has carried away its wife as some man has carried away my wife, hasn't he? [240] …Oh! Sita! I am unable to bear your absence!…The fire of your separation is scorching me!" [241]

Lakshmana frightened the peacock pair with his bow. The peacock contained its enthusiasm, wound up its frolicking, folded its feather tail, swung it and ran after the peahen.

The peahen said to the peacock, with wonder, "Darling! Those animals wander without mates! That dark animal looks at us enviously."

The peacock unfolding its feather tail again said, "Why bother about them? Come on, dear! Let us dance. Raise your head and look at those cloud curtains! Feel the cool breeze! Look at the clouds of flowers." He commenced frolicking.

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[240] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 1, sloka 40:** Rama is saying with a sigh, "No Rakshasa abducted the mate of this peacock. That is why he is dancing with his mate in this lovely forest." Though seemingly happy that others are enjoying themselves, the underlying sense is not that. It is envious lamentation that "they do not face troubles as we do! They are happy! We alone suffer like this!" Why should a feeling that 'all happy people mock us', be there? This means, if he were happy and others face distress, he too would do the same! Rama is imputing his own temperament to others. The poet moulds the temperament and nature of the characters under the influence of society. Rama's character is not beyond that. A noteworthy point is that there is no difference between Rama's psychology and thinking and those of today. ★

[241] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 1, sloka 41:** "It is utterly unbearable to be separated from Sita in the spring" — It is very difficult for Rama to be without Sita in spring! In the hot summer, the surroundings do not "excite lust", so it would not matter if Sita were not there with him. What more proof is required to show why wives are needed? ★

Feeling ashamed on wasting a moment by turning her attention to the black animals from her dear one, the peahen joined the frolic.

"Lakshmana! Do you know the glory of spring? Out of a passionate desire even birds and animals do not go far away from their male partners. If the Rakshasa had not abducted her, Sita too would have approached me with the torment of sexual desire!"

Lakshmana bowed his head, unable to imagine the scene of sister-in-law approaching his brother with the torment of sexual desire.

The description of sexual desire of his brother is still going on. "Lakshmana! Women come near men during this season with desire inclined towards romantic pleasure. This spring…." Rama stopped speaking suddenly. "Does this splendour of spring excite lust in Sita too? Would Sita too anguish for the embrace of men burnt by the fire of lust? If spring splendour is the same where Sita is…won't it be so? Why not?…The glory of this season spreads everywhere alike, doesn't it?[242] Then can Sita escape the clutches of cupid?…After all she is in prime youth. She is far from the pleasure of romance. She will feel ecstatic at the sight of flowers and birds. The spring will whip up any one, however insensitive one might be! Can Sita subdue that?

Rama walked ahead with steps that shook the earth and with dilated nostrils and sharpened looks.

"Brother, sir! There, that is Rishyamuka……"

"Lakshmana! A great mistake has occurred."

"Yes, Brother Sir!"

"How sinful of women to flout the commands of their husbands?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Actually I had asked her not to come."

"Yes, brother sir!… But…."

"In the residence of another man…my wife…what a disgrace! What an…infam…."

"Yes, brother sir!…But…beg your pardon… That is destined by god…. elders… sages…"

"Ugh! Destined by god…Why all this splendour of forest for me without Sita! While she sorrows in a stranger's abode…can I enjoy the beauty of this spring?…You, for that matter….coming away, leaving Sita behind in the hermitage…Transgressing my order…Oh! Those wicked ones…. to my darling… cutting to pieces…."

Lakshmana struck dumb fell prostrate at the feet of Rama.

Rama became a bit calm and walked ahead engrossed in his thoughts.

The wind is wandering carrying the fragrance of neem flowers. The trees that blossomed smell very sweetly like luxurious men wearing perfumes. Peeping out of the leaves, bunches of flowers are touching the cheeks and shoulders of Lakshmana and are hiding again.

Finding an accessible path and ascending the mountain quickly, Lakshmana is eager to talk to Sugriva.

"Alas! The sight of these lotuses reminds me of the face of Sita! The whole forest reminds me again and again of Sita!….I am unable to bear the anguish of this separation…whatever the difficulties Sita might encounter…She

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242. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 1, slokas 47 & 48: "If the splendour of this spring is the same in the place where my darling is, she may be afflicted by cupid and bewailing like me, it is true!"

"Spring will be absent in the place where Sita is. It is true. If it is present how can she bear the separation from me and be alive?" Rama is caught in a dilemma whether the spring is the same where Sita is. If it is the same, Sita would experience the desire for sex. "Then how can she live without me?", Rama wonders. Then, how is he able to live without Sita! ★

would relieve me from the affliction of cupid, wouldn't she? Can I survive this fire of spring without Sita?" so wailed Rama.

Looking at the mountain, Lakshmana spoke inattentively. "Yes, brother sir! You can survive", he submitted. As Rama lacked the habit of listening to answers, the conversation passed smoothly.

"Lakshmana! Look at that crow! Once when Sita and I were talking pleasantly, it cawed harshly out of spite. Now see, how gladly it crows!"

Looking attentively at the crow and saluting his brother obediently, Lakshmana submitted, "That crow and this crow are not the same, brother sir!"

"You say so Lakshamana?"

"Yes, brother sir! It is so. That crow was different and this crow is different! This appears lonely, separated from its flock."

"Alas! See these bunches of flowers of *Asoka*! How they tease me, swinging!"

Lakshmana got angry and plucked roughly all Asoka flower bunches all along the path and flung them afar.

All along the path *Modugu* too blossomed abundantly hiding the leaves. *Turayi* flower bunches too blossomed at a height beyond the reach of Lakshmana and swayed their heads. The wind is blowing from flower to flower, tree to tree and hill to hill like naughty children. The flowers on the lake are swinging in ripples on the waves of the wind. Humble bees are coming out humming from the flowers. Flowers are turning silent after shaking, shivering and sinking into sweet memories. Buds from behind the leaves, about to blossom in a moment or soon, are listening to the humming of humble bees with innocent happiness.

"Alas! These flowers... these scents... the humble bees... if all these do not torment me so much, I would have borne this separation... this lust...[243]

Oh! This spring season reminds me of my wife repeatedly", said Rama and sighed like a volcano. "Lakshmana! If virtuous Sita were by my side in the surroundings of Pampa and the splendour of the forest....I would not wish for even heaven. I would not return to Ayodhya even!" so saying, he sighed like the hot wind.[244]

Rama — who could forget his wife if the trees had not bloomed...if cuckoos had not cooed...if humble bees had not flown — forgot that Ayodhya would become more important for him than Sita when the Pampa lake went dry in the scorching hot summer, creepers fade, trees become dry and the spring loses its splendour.

"Alas! The fire of this spring burns me cruelly and mercilessly!...Lakshmana, get Pampa water, my boy!"

Lakshmana, hastily trampling the flowers on the bank of Pampa, stepping in and plucking lotus leaves, brought a leaf cup of water for his brother.

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[243] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 1, sloka 69:** "If this month of spring with blossomed trees does not torment me, I would have borne this lust generated now" — so Rama proclaims his specific greatness. This is his control of the senses! If the trees do not blossom, he would be an outstanding one subduing passions! But trees blossom, any way! He doesn't know whether his wife is alive or dead! He has no concern about her safety. He is only repeatedly howling about 'affliction of lust' ! 'Affliction of lust!' In this scene, it becomes very clear, without any concealment, how a man employs a woman and why he wishes her to be with him. All the need Rama has with Sita is only physical. There is nothing more than his desiring her. ★

[244] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 1, sloka: 95:**

"If chaste Sita appears here...if an opportunity to spend time here with her comes...I do not desire the position of Indra and return to Ayodhya" — Sita should appear in a state of being chaste. If she appears in a state of molestation and abandonment by Ravana, she will be unacceptable. This idea has been there since the beginning. We have to notice this point. ★

Wetting his face with that water, Rama fumed, "Alas! Even this Pampa water is so fragrant! It adds fuel to my lust-fire!"

Unable to comprehend the conduct of his brother, Lakshmana stood fiercely as though no fire would burn him. Lakshmana's inner voice asked mockingly, "It seems you have not read any sex science (*Kama sastra*) books! Lakshmana has no intention to talk about anything. "Yes, it seems so. You may not have read anything except the 'science of serving the feet' of your elder brother. Even if you have read any, how do you remember them? Are you any celebrity?"

"What is this rudeness?"

"Why are you annoyed? This is always so with you. Why don't you understand that I always think about your welfare?"

"Then you mean that you alone wish for my welfare and my older brother doesn't?"

"Why all these questions? These flowers and such which are not able to affect you…are burning your brother in fire. What is the matter?"

"Well, his love is such, for his wife."

"I get irritated with you…Let it be so…What can you do? If he has so much love, why doesn't he try to talk with Sugriva?"

"Why doesn't he?…He will do…Doesn't he? He does! These flowers reminded him of his wife…He grieves remembering his wife…"

The inner voice shut its mouth. "You find fault with Sri Rama?" Lakshmana flew into a rage against it. Then he saw his brother.

"Lakshmana! I cannot survive this affliction of separation!… There!… See those water fowls near the Mogali bush…The female tries to escape…the male bird…forcibly in the fashion of a cock…how…" Rama jerked unable to continue. He is perturbed as though all his nerves broke down — Ravana too…with Sita…forcibly…in the fashion of a cock….women are feeble! Powerless! Sita being helpless…yields?…. Such a chaste lady! What chastity still?…That rogue!…A man other than the husband!…who made many efforts…not afraid of death even…abducted her and would such a fellow show mercy? He is lascivious for other women….without fulfilling his desire…will he give up?

The bow in the hand slipped out of grip. Rama is about to stoop to the ground and Lakshmana caught hold of him, feeling anxious.

"Lakshmana! With Sita…."

"Brother! Be brave!"

Tears trickled down from the eyes of Rama…"How can I be brave! Lakshmana!… That villain… molest… Sita…. Has he swallowed her?"

"No, brother! Never will it be so…. That holy lady…None will…"

"What holiness! Could she prevent the abduction?"

"Pardon me brother…All that is fate…Such a chaste woman…Nobody will…."

"Lakshmana! Your words do not offer me comfort, not even a whit! How much better it would have been, if Sita had not come! How safe women are in harems!…What a protection!…."

"Excuse me, brother sir! Can sister-in-law be happy in her chambers, being away from your service?"

Rama got angry quickly. He looked at Lakshmana, as if saying, "Did you, in fact, ask her to come? Yes, I know you instigated her to come."

Lakshmana is afraid of Rama's looks and kept silent with folded hands.

Rama, who is engrossed deeply in thoughts, raised his head, and asked, "Lakshmana! Strange men abducting chaste women…Have you ever heard such stories?"

Lakshmana thought about it quickly.

He had heard stories of strange men abducting forcibly…many women…but had never heard of their release.

"Long ago…"

"Yes, long ago?…Come on, quick"

"Indra's wife"

"What, Indra's wife even?...Was it Ravana?"

"No, brother, sir!...Some other vile Rakshasa..."

"Then...what did he do?"

"Abducted her....?"

"Later on Indra fought with that Rakshasa....got his wife released and brought her back"

"Brought her back?...That is all right...Did that Rakshasa...do anything...to that chaste woman..."

"Didn't do anything, brother!"

"Didn't do anything? ...Then why that abduction?"

Lakshmana could not say 'why'. He lowered his head. He felt ashamed that he could not tell his brother other stories.

Rama's conscience...is irritated...with a bit of anger...but brave.

"What is this justice!...Doesn't he know that Sita is a great devoted wife? She would rather end her life committing suicide than yield to any man other than the husband? Why all these evil suspicions?...I don't like it." Rama's conscience said and kept silent.[245]

Rama felt glad as if he were enlightened. Yes, Sita is virtuous. Serving her husband...Devotion to her husband...is her vow. She will never yield to Ravana! She will not resort to such a vile thing.

Rama's mind became as light as a ripe leaf. He stood up greatly invigorated. The whole world looked like an ocean of happiness.

The breeze is carrying the fragrance of *Kovidara* flowers. Two elephants are spraying water with their trunks in the Pampa. They are spouting on each other, as if in sport. Humble bees are going in search of honey. Trees are swinging their tops and then branches are dancing, touching one another.

All the birds are hopping all of a sudden, as if they heard gladdening news. "There are lots of insects in the grass shrubs of Pampa. I have had my fill now. Go, quick."

"We ate them up day before yesterday, didn't we?"

"No, they are there again, go quickly!"

"What type of insects? Those red ones?...Are they tasty?"

"Oh! My mouth waters again. Come on, I too shall go with you"

Birds are flying in flocks all over the forest.

"Lakshmana! Look that side! On the left side of Pampa, near the foot of the mountain, *Madhulika* creepers are in full bloom and cause me pain!...."

"Don't look that side, brother..."

"See here...antelopes in pairs...The eyes of the antelopes remind me of Sita, you see!"

"Don't look this side, brother..."

"Alas!...These birds fly in flocks to excite my lust!"

"Don't look any side, brother..."

All the pieces of advice of Lakshmana are going waste.

Rama is looking at every thing except toward Rishyamuka.

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245. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 1, sloka 51:

"It is not possible for Sita to live from my *viraham*, the romantic separation. Because she is a chaste woman. It seems so to my mind" — 'seems to mind' means that Rama is thinking about it. Rama concealed that Sita also would suffer romantic separation in spring season. Then the question is 'what will she do'. Rama had to think so much about her conduct since Sita is with Ravana. If it is not possible for Sita to survive the suffering of romantic separation, one chance is open to her — that is, 'yielding to Ravana'. Rama confirms, "But that won't happen. Since Sita is a devoted wife, she would rather die than behave otherwise."

The spring season, romantic separation leading to death — all these are exaggerations in feudal literature. Rama would be glad if Sita died out of romantic separation. But he would not like to live with her if she returned molested. We have to understand these 'values'. ★

The creepers that intertwined the trees appeared like fat women, increasing Rama's pain of lust.[246]

The cunning nature of this spring season is surprising. It reminds me of Sita again and again."

He intends to forget Sita. But this season reminds him of her again and again.

Lakshmana looked around if Sita appeared from somewhere suddenly.

Rama has stopped searching — as if it were all Lakshmana's duty!

"Those mango sprouts burn like red flames, you see!... Alas! Lakshmana!...This cupid... too cruelly... tortures" said Rama and fainted on the ground convulsing.

Jerking in surprise and quickly turning back, Lakshmana drew the sword, "Who?...Who is he, brother, sir? Who has tormented you?...Who is that wicked fellow?" He looked all around.

Rama said sighing. "This god of sex... this fellow with the bow of flowers... conspiring with the fire of spring..."

"God of sex?...Who is that god of sex?... Oh! You mean cupid?" said Lakshmana and his fury having abated, back the sword in its sheath, stood there as if saying, "All right, what can we do against him?"

"Lakshmana! This cool breeze..."

"Brother, sir!...If you permit me...I shall go to meet Sugriva."

Rama looked at him puzzled as if questioning, "Sugriva? Who is Sugriva?"

Lakshmana continued in his usual manner. "Brother, sir!... There. That is Rishyamuka Mountain. As Kabandha said... it seems difficult to reach there. But even then, I shall try and fulfil the task. Permit me", he said and saluted Rama with a bow.

Kabandha... face in the belly... cremation... Pampa Lake... fish... prawns... Rishyamuka — Yes, Sugriva? — Rama recollected everything. Sighed in despair. — How can Sugriva, without kingdom, help him? Is it a joke fighting with the king of Rakshasas? There should be an army and a treasury!

"By the by....Kabandha said that we need to help Sugriva? Have you guessed what it might be, Lakshmana?"

"I shall go there and find out every thing, brother"

Rama looked around! It was all quiet. Except birds and deer... No cruel animal... "Lakshmana! Can I get back my Sita? I shall perish, depressed and enfeebled in this state of grief and romantic separation!... My wife is young. An embodiment of beauty... Faultless. See those full grown creepers like fat noble women embracing those trees tight. See the wind, intoxicated with a variety of perfumes roams about like a mad man. Good men along with their women alone can enjoy all this beauty!...[247]

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246. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 1, sloka 84: "Like fat noble women, creepers embrace these trees" — In feudal literature noble women means fat women! That fattening also should not be disorderly. Breasts should be fat. Waist should be narrow. Thighs and buttocks should be heavy. Lips and cheeks should be thin like leaves. In this way, if a woman with thin cheeks, big breasts, narrow waist and heavy thighs — twists like a creeper — she is a noble woman! She belongs to an excellent class of women! A woman belonging to the *Padmini* category! Man desires this type of a woman. If the physique of the woman fails to offer happiness to man, she belongs to the *Senkhini* category! The lowest of the low! There are no such rules for the physique of a man! ★

247. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 1, sloka 110:

"My mind feels greatly distressed at not finding Sita's face which is endowed with eyes of fine eyelids, perfumes, brightness and are faultless..." — Prior to the abduction of Sita by Ravana, this word 'faultless' never came in the description of Sita. Now what does this word 'faultless' indicate? This is the answer for the conflict in Rama's mind, "Has she committed any fault or not?" Rama assures himself with the argument, "She has not gone with Ravana willingly." If not, what is the need of repeating 'faultless Sita', 'faultless Sita' again and again.

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Women!... Other men's wives!.... Ravana... Again... What thoughts are these? No... such thoughts should not be there.

"My Sita... Elegance... Fine eyelids... locks... cheeks..." Rama is remembering the beauty of his wife repeatedly only after another man has abducted her. His wife, who is so beautiful...in the residence of another man...! Oh, these thoughts do not leave his mind! Surprising! Sita has great love for him....He too showed affection in the same manner. Sita is not an ordinary woman! A great devout wife! Faultless! [248]

"Lakshmana! Like of devoted wives, Sita accompanied me and suffered travails and tribulations. Without abandoning me, she has been with me, who lost his kingdom and was mentally upset. Such a chaste wife is away from me! If King Janaka asks me in the assembly after returning to Ayodhya, "Is Sita safe? Where is she?", what answer can I give him? If my mother asks where her daughter-in-law is, what can I say?... As it is, I am distressed that Bharata leads a life of a sage giving up all comforts and luxuries. In the meanwhile, this separation from my wife!... Apart from that, this torment of cupid, which is scorching my life totally!.... Now how can I live? Lakshmana! Go back to Ayodhya, my lad! Bharata is a highly worthy person. He has affection for his brothers. Be happy in his presence. I shall give up my mortal coil in this forest. I can hardly live a moment

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→ A wife should be young. Should be the embodiment of beauty. Should be faultless. If a wife of such type is missing, the husband wails out of romantic separation for a while in spring season. If it is not spring, this will be absent.

This sort of erotic urge according to seasons is natural only among animals, especially. Even though the influence of seasons is seen on human bodies, here (in the case of human beings) it is not of prime importance. Here mutual affection and love among men and women are of prime importance. For them seasons are not of much importance.

When an enemy abducted his wife, when she was in great danger this gem of a man, husband, cries out of lust! Moreover in the presence of his younger brother who has forgotten the touch of a woman for thirteen years and who is not worried about it! Pouring out his sexual suffering to the same younger brother!

Feudal poets are utter block heads! They are not aware of even an elementary thing that descriptions and incidents should be in accordance with the context. They think that the entire world should shed tears at the torment of the lust of the hero.

The description of the erotic urge and such in the spring are stupid actions that are ignorant of the distinction between animal relations and human relations! ★

248. "Sita has much affection for me. I too showed affection towards her in every possible way" — This is not simply some description of a person or a lake. Rama is recounting the sort of relationship between him and his wife. He is analysing if there is any possibility of her committing a fault. She loved him, all right! He too loved her well! Never did he trouble her. If he troubled her, there would have been some meaning if she had showed interest in another man and transgress morality. But he had never done such a thing! — This is the conflict in his mind. The basis for this is the thought, "Sita may commit a mistake". Whatever thoughts and doubts that a husband gets when his wife is in the possession of another man, all those may enter the mind of the poet. He depicts the same. Outwardly, there may be any number of veils like "ideal married life" and "love" and however poetically one may describe them, when we critically examine the relationship between Sita and Rama, it was merely like any other relationship that exists between a wife and husband in a feudal society. ★

without Sita!" said Rama began to pine.[249]

Lakshmana was thirsty for some time. He thought of getting into Pampa and drink water. On seeing the grief of his brother, he forbade the mean thirst and hurried to ascend the mountain. He fell prostrate at his brother's feet in all humility with folded hands. "Pardon me brother! This base fellow is not worthy of advising you. You are very great! Brave! A hero among heroes! It is not fit on your part to forget your best qualities. It is not proper for a valiant man like you to get so depressed. Is it not but natural that sorrow comes when near and dear are separated? So, one has to control the excessive affection for a while for those who are far away and one has to have courage…Not that I am worthy of advising you. When actions fail, they do not come to fruition without human effort. What more strength is there than enthusiasm? This is not something that you don't know. If we have zeal, is there anything that we cannot achieve? An able and capable noble man like you should not grieve so much about achieving the goal, should he?…"

Rama continued to wail mutterlingly.

Lakshmana is not disheartened. Lakshmana, whose words and deeds are not different, gathered enthusiasm. "Brother, sir, Be courageous! You are a man of self control! You have subdued your sensory organs! Lust, anger, miserliness, infatuation, conceit and envy do not affect you. You should not yield to this base sexual desire, should you?….This grief…this lust…you should abandon them at once. You should not feel so helpless. Where has your fortitude gone? With your courage and bravery, you can search for and trace where sister-in-law is. Even if Ravana runs away to the nether world…even to still further lower depths, your sharp arrows will not spare him, will they?…That wicked fellow…if he does not give you back my sister-in-law of his own accord…I myself…going there…."[250]

Raising his head a bit out of the ocean of grief, Rama said, pining, "Alas! Poor fellow!…a man other than the husband…Will he give back another man's wife of his own accord?"…Rama saw as if saying, "If it were me, I would not have returned her" and again lowered his head to moan again.

Terribly enraged and shaking at the feet of his brother, Lakshmana said, "Won't he give her back? All right! He will face total ruin. I shall not spare him even if he hides himself in

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249. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 1, sloka 104: "The spring season torments me, when I am already in sorrow that Bharata lives outside the city and spends his time in vows and fasts and for Sita's abduction." So far, we have not noticed Rama's sorrow for Bharata. He might be wailing secretly even without the knowledge of the poet! He does not at all feel sorry for Satrughna and Lakshmana. Rama says, "Lakshmana! Go back to Ayodhya." Does he intend it really? It is because Lakshmana would not go anyway! He knows pretty well that he won't go and hence he said it casually. The whole thing is a pretension! Deception!…Will Rama become noble, just because he casually asked his brother — who has been living with him and bearing hardships — "Go away, my lad!" How nice it have been if Lakshmana had turned back saying, "All right, brother, I shall go!" But it does not happen so. It is contrary to his behaviour. Just as ordinary men in society say things for the sake of a formality, pretension and to keep face, Rama also speaks the same way. The poet does not know any 'ideal life' beyond the influence of that society. ★

250. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 1, slokas 116 to 128: See how Lakshmana whets the courage of Rama… "Give up sorrow. Give up lust…You have not realised yourself…. How good hearted…. How brave… you are?" says Lakshmana.

Lakshmana - who loves Rama unswerving and who is courageous - explained Rama the politics and pointed to his strength and removed Rama's grief" Lakshmana explaining Rama what his strength was! ★

the womb of the mother of Indra. What need is there for my involvement, brother?... Your sharp arrows themselves...."

"Alas!... Sita!... Where are you!... Sita!... Alas!... Without seeing you... this fire of spring... Alas! How can I survi....."

All the vital organs of Lakshmana are about to sink. But he picked up courage. "Brother...Be brave...I am not qualified to advise you"

The flowering plants that are beside those brothers are wonder struck.

"*Chandana*!... Do you know who that person is?" — creeper *Vakula* asked.

"That is what I am trying to get, Vakula!... They look like brothers. The older one seems to be indomitable!"

"Poor man. Grieving over something"

"Yes. Grieving terribly... cries 'Sita! Sita!' Perhaps his wife might have passed away."

"It may not be so. May be grieving that it was not so!"

"Tut! What are you talking?" said *Asoka* from the other side.

"What is wrong in our words? Will human males feel sorry when their wives die? Do they have any dearth of wives? They get them in abundance."

"Leave it be! You always talk so...The older one says something. Let us listen, wait."

"What will you listen to?...What a pity! It seems he will *make* his brother *drink up the waters* of Pampa, causing him terrible trouble!"

"Ugh! Will you keep silent?"

Placing his head on his shoulders, his shoulders on his knees, his knees on the ground and himself crouching on the ground, Rama pined. Insects in the grass looked at the feet of Rama, eagerly!

With the change of the sun, Pampa is decorating itself with fresh flowers. All those were white flowers that day. Humble bees flew in that direction. The breeze carried fresh fragrance over Rama. Rama shook off the dust from the knees, raised his head and shoulders.

"Brother, sir! You are the one who has subdued passions! Hero of the heroes!..."

"Alas! ...Sita!...My beloved!"

"Brother! Mountains do not move at the stroke of wind. Brave men like you can't be shaken by hardships."

"Is that so Lakshmana?"

"It is so, brother!"

"Alas!... Sita!... My beloved!... If you had not come with me... How better it would have...", so saying Rama sprang up suddenly and shook off his '*dhoti*' (lower garment). He shook his thighs which were as fat as the trunk of a Banyan tree.

Two grass-hoppers hopped out of the *dhoti* and fell at a distance and frowned. ★

[Translation: **R.Venkateswara Rao**]

There is no link
between the 6th story
and the 7th story.
Now, the 7th story begins at once.

Story-7

The Accomplices

(Rama and Sugriva)

Sugriva is observing Rama and Lakshmana, from behind rocks on the mountain. They have long swords and arrows in their hands. Moreover, they are climbing up the mountain making their way. Slight tremors began in the hands of Sugriva, who is a hero among heroes. - Who are they? What do they have to do on this mountain with arms?... What else? Vali must have sent them to kill me. Otherwise, what do have they to do here?

Brave Sugriva dropped down behind the rocks and sank thrusting his feet and hands in his belly. Now, in a moment I will be finished. They…surely will get on to the mountain…will search for me and catch hold of me…then those swords will… from the heart to the back… or from the back to the flank or from back into back…

The two hands of Sugriva are *playing cymbal* on the rock in a confused state. Thinking that he was calling them with signs Nila and *Tarudu,* who sat smoking cigars at a distance, came to him hurriedly and asked, "What, what, your Excellency?"

Since he is valorous, Sugriva, using his strength and ability, cleverly stopped playing cymbals with hands, held tight his shaking jaws, gritted teeth, unfolded only one finger and pointed in the direction of that 'terrible scene' from behind the rocks.

"They look like sages, king", said Tarudu, recklessly. Tarudu is none than the father-in-law of Sugriva. It was the wish of Tarudu to see his son-in-law become a king. So, he calls his son-in-law 'O king!' 'O king!'. He shows the obedience due to a king.

King Sugriva got angrier than he was shivering. "Sages? What sort of sages? All pretence. It seems that wicked fellow has sent them. Now we…." The king's jaws got loose and began to chatter rapidly.

If a little noise of any ant reached the ears of king Sugriva, it means the wicked Vali had sent that out! Why does the ant reach the mountain if not to kill him?...What has it got to do on the mountain?...Moreover, those who are coming are neither ants nor mosquitoes. They are like breeding bulls. Moreover…in their hands….!

"Might be so! But, if they are sages, why those swords?"

"Yes!...Why those arrows?"

Tarudu and Nila fell into doubt. Nala also came and *joined their doubt* on seeing the swords.

Hanuman is in a hurry to pound snuff, burning some leaves.

Sugriva tightened his jaws and attempting to rush through the rocks seriously, said, "What should we do now?...Decide quickly! Think at once!" Uttering these few words rapidly, he looked irritably as if saying, "Who are the ministers, you or I? Am I a minister to think about it?" He looked around.

All the three ministers started thinking. They had consultations.

"Do you remember what we should do when the enemy suddenly pounces on us?" Nila asked Tarudu in confusion.

"Not simply pouncing on us like that. With swords…!" Sugriva said angrily.

"That is what we are thinking about, your Excellency!"

"We are thinking of taking swords also into account."

"All right! All right! Quick! Add arrows as well"

The ministers recalled all political principles quickly. All of them remembered only one principle. Finally, they revealed that scientific principle, with great enlightenment and in unison. "Quickly…each has to take to his heels, O great king"

"In the code of politics, they say, '*think of harm first and then about the good*'. Let us hide our heads in the caves, your Excellency…"

King Sugriva had already begun jumping over the rocks, by then. If hiding oneself in caves is laid down in the political code, what else can anybody do? - The king so running away had the title of 'he, who is like a terror to the foes!' He had another title, 'hero of heroes' also! He had the seventh title, 'he, who never showed his back to his enemies!' He had the seventeenth title of a 'valorous one'! 'Brave one' was his twenty seventh title! Any number of titles might have been there, but all of them would vanish before swords! When political principles preach the hiding of heads in caves, Nala, Nila and Tarudu continued leaping over and crossing one another. [251]

Even before his Excellency Sugriva's head reached cave, Nala fell on Nila, Nila fell on Tarudu and the silk *dhoti* of the king got entangled in Tarudu's feet and the king fell face downwards. The knee-pans of the king appeared like two red lotuses and both his eyes became dark clouds and those clouds rained on the rocks in ripples. On seeing the calamitous scenes of the rolling king and ministers in jumble, all the birds got frightened and began to fly and hop about noisily.

Hanuman sniffed some snuff, packed the remaining snuff in leaves, thrust it in his waist and came out blowing his nose all along.

Sugriva sat flat on a rock *majestically* and had tears in his eyes *solemnly*.

The ministers gathered round the knees of the king and began *the treatment of 'puffing'* the wounds to the best of their ability.

Leaving the knees to the care of the ministers and looking after the care of his jaws to himself and holding them tight, Sugriva said, "They have swords and daggers! If they and you fight…suppose I too will join you…we five…can we kill both of them? Oh!…It is difficult! They have swords, no jokes?..." He attempted to bend his knees and felt convulsion.

When Hanuman arrived, all the ministers signalled to him and pointed the 'actual horrible thing' from behind the rocks.

Lakshmana is walking ahead striking on the bushes with his sword to make the path clear of any snakes and the like. Rama is walking skilfully following Lakshmana and is following him.

Hanuman puffed out his cheeks, tightened his mouth and looked at them thinking for a while.

While Hanuman was pondering, every body felt relieved. Sugriva and others have a good trust in Hanuman. They knew that Hanuman would not lose heart if any problem arose. He would pounce on the opponents if there was a need without thinking about the consequences. Of all the ministers, Hanuman is a big support for king Sugriva. "What? Have you seen? Tell me… quick"

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251. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 2, sloka 10:

"King Sugriva could not be steady on seeing Rama and Lakshmana, who were brothers and in possession of superior weapons since he was afraid and helpless… Sugriva's mind was disturbed… His mind, very afraid, felt sorrow. All strong monkeys leaping from one hill to another… destroyed the blossomed trees on the mountains" - So, that is the thing! Only now Sugriva and Hanuman entered the story. All these days, our view has been that Sugriva was a great 'valorous person'. Hereafter, we can see his 'valour' with our own eyes. The poet describes Sugriva as a great valorous man at every place. But it is the view of the poet that if Sugriva does not fear the presence of Rama, it would diminish the valour of Rama. If the fear comes on knowing that the one coming is Rama, it is different. But without knowing who the fellow was, if one shivers seeing some one who is passing by…then it amounts to Sugriva's cowardice. This the poet has not grasped. The story that follows will keep proving Sugriva's cowardice. ★

Hanuman puffed the air in his cheeks and said, "Oh! For this?...On seeing your anxiety I thought it was Vali coming, my goodness! Why are you afraid of passers-by, your Excellency? Moreover, you know that Vali will not come here, don't you?...." He squatted on the rock.

Struggling to exhibit kingly majesty despite the knee pan injury, Sugriva frowned and said, "Of course, Vali will not come… Hanuman! But he might send some heroes! If it is not so… those two... who are they?" Sugriva tightened his cheeks.

"We shall find out who they are and what they are. Why shiver for such a simple thing?"

"Oh! No! Have we shivered?... Since these ministers talked of some political ethics…"

"Enough of it, king? You get easily perplexed", said Hanuman irritably. Hanuman knew thoroughly all the lifelines of Sugriva. Reprimanding the king is smooth sailing for Hanuman. "For a king… How knowledgeable should he be?... How clear should he be?... Yes… if something happens… You should understand carefully what is right and what is wrong…Well, I don't know…If it is like this…how will you rule your kingdom…the people…"[252]

"Ugh!...Leave that!...Do you think a king rules all alone?...Don't I have very great ministers like you?...Come here!... Look at them well through this crevice! Tell me, who will not get frightened if they, like fat bulls, come brandishing swords? As it is, we are in troubles! We are wandering on the rocks and hills. Should we not have a bit of foresight?"

Hanuman thought for a while and asked, "So, you say, Vali sent them, your Excellency?" He showed some obedience.

"Yes…surely it must be the plan of that wicked fellow! He has a *bellyful of plans*. Will any king let his enemies live in peace? Will he allow us to eat and roam about? You have to go and find out what exactly the matter is?

"Yes, You too have to go disguised as a sage like them", said Tarudu.

Sugriva got anxious and said, "Suppose there may be no harm to us from them and they may not be even our enemies. Even then, we should not keep quiet and be indifferent. Then, find out why they are coming here. Start quickly! Talk tactfully and find out the actual purpose. Don't hurl words, talk carefully!...Of course, you know well how to talk to people? Come on, start". He hastened Hanuman, while soothing his knees in between his talking.

Hanuman got up with the enthusiasm of performing a great task. He disrobed his 'dhoti' and wore it in the fashion of an ascetic. The packet of snuff fell down from the waist and he wanted to put it in the hollow of a tree. Then, Nila caught hold of it, and said, "I will keep it with me" and sniffed the snuff.

Nila plucked rudely all the available flower creepers and tied them around the hair, neck and hands of Hanuman. Hanuman went inside the cave and brought an earthen water mug.

"Be careful! Tactfully… fittingly… cleverly… fittingly… tactfully…"

"As it is they look like breeding bulls…"

"We shall hide our heads in the cave…what else can we do, the political ethics are so…"

The king, the ministers and all hid themselves behind the rocks and saw off Hanuman, advising him, "Be Brave!"

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As Lakshmana and Rama were climbing up the mountain with great difficulty, Hanuman

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252. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 2, slokas 17 & 18: See Hanuman is reprimanding Sugriva. "Your generic beastliness finds expression since you lack good thinking and you are fickle minded. Sir, one has to conduct affairs, considering all aspects. A king who lacks cleverness, knowledge and commonsense cannot protect his people."

Of course Sugriva gave a boastful reply to this. "Who will not get frightened at the sight of such heroes, tell me?" So, that was all for the greatness of those heroes and not his own cowardice!

★

climbed down fast as usual and approached them.

Rama felt relieved to see a sage emerging out of the rocks. Lakshmana is anxiously looking forward to see if they could get any information about Sugriva.

Hanuman with a happy face and rubbing hands with respect began to talk looking at Lakshmana only.

"Sirs!...Don't know who you are, but handsome and appealing like gods. Whether you came from heaven or Vaikuntha, the abode of Lord Vishnu! You look like sages, but you must be kings or emperors! Oh, you must be very great people. Your valour…Your heroism…yes, yes! Can they be concealed even if you attempted to conceal it?...No, No. How can they be concealed? At the very sight of you…may it be birds…animals.. or humans...have to tremble greatly. I have seen even lions, but…No! Where do lions stand in comparison with you?...Your shoulders are like trunks of elephants…Your appearance…"

At that moment, Rama repented a lot for not walking in the front.

"Don't know why you are in this attire…You are fit to sit on thrones and rule like emperors! You should rule these hills…valleys…forest…and for that matter the entire earth! Your *noses and faces* are alike, both resemble each other! I think you are brothers. You appear *like the sun and the moon.*

The praise of the new sage has not made Rama much happy. Rama did not at all relish clubbing Lakshmana with him and he praised together.

As Hanuman was talking to him directly, Lakshmana felt uncomfortable and slowly stepped backwards. Rama stepped forward *serenely.*

"How brightly you people glitter!... Alas!... There is no iota of gold on your body. How bare you are! If you are decorated all over… with gems, diamonds and jewels… even a *thousand eyes will not be enough to look at* you."

Rama's shoulders got elated, reminded of the jewels.

"What if jewels are not there? The very complexion of your body itself is like gold!"

Rama looked Lakshmana skew eyed as if he asked, "Is he not ridiculing us?"

"Oh, look around. How these mountains and hills are glittering in the reflection of your complexion on them!...Water in the Pampa appears as if it is mixed with gold! It is strange! For that matter, even your bows? Studded with gold…what a beauty! What a beauty! They are creating terror in the hearts of the onlookers. These arrows are not arrows! They are verily hissing cobra snakes out of their pits!...Now, what to say about your swords?...Oh! No! We need not talk about them…"[253]

Going into ecstasy, Rama looked somewhere with half closed eyes.

After showering all sorts of praise and describing the brightness of their body, faces, bows and swords, Hanuman found nothing to do. "Sirs, whoever you are, you are very great", said he and stood there mumbling.

Rama did not come out of ecstasy even to say, "No, not both of us! I alone am great"

Thinking that he should not take the initiative, Lakshmana kept quiet without interfering.

The secret in Hanuman's thoughts that he will be exposed is gushing out. Unable to contain it any further, Hanuman said, "Sir!

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253. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 3, slokas 5 to 8: Laudatory words of Hanuman are only this much: "You seem to be great warriors. You seem to be great kings. You seem fit to rule the entire world. Your physiques have to be decorated with gold and gems." Not even a single word here depicts the greatness of sages. Praising a sage, "You seem to be great kings" means that those sages feel more happiness by a kingship than by the life of a sage. The attention of the sages is always focused on power, riches and wealth. This clamouring finds expression on the face of every sage. More clearly so on Rama's face.

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Though I have donned this attire, I am not a sage! We belong to the *Vanara* (monkey) race. Our king Sugriva is suffering a lot due to his cunning brother. I am working under Sugriva as his minister. I am called Hanuman. Our king is very fond of me. I came to you since he alone sent me to talk to you. All people in this area know me…Oh! They know me very well." Hanuman giggled out of the enthusiasm on describing himself.[254]

Lakshmana's face turned bright on hearing about Sugriva that they could meet his sister-in-law soon.

Rama felt relieved that hereafter Sugriva would do the job of searching for Sita. 'Why is there enmity between Vali and Sugriva…? The hostility between the brothers might help me! Benefit for me…from the elder brother?...or younger brother?...' New waves of thought began in Rama's mind and political sphere.

While looking at Rama and Lakshmana, Hanuman is unable to grasp as to who is superior between the two and with whom he should talk. He saw both of them in turns. "Our king Sugriva is a great hero. Valorous. He sent me to make friends with you!", Hanuman said and looked at them as if asking them, "what do you say?"

Rama nodded his head *serenely* and looked at Lakshmana smilingly to make clear his speciality to the minister of king Sugriva. Appreciating Hanuman, he said, "Lakshmana! So you heard this?...He says that he is the minister of Sugriva. See how well he speaks!...It seems he has studied all *Sastras* (sciences) thoroughly. Though he has spoken so many words not even a single error occurred! There are no mistakes in pronunciation. No verbosity…has he stumbled for words? No! Yet, has he spoken verbosely? No." Rama spoke verbosely.

Hanuman lowered his head shyly and stood. He looked at Rama in reverence. He confirmed in his mind that this gentleman was more intelligent and greater than the other.

Rama's praise for Hanuman is not yet over. He looked at Hanuman *serenely*. "It seems you have read all the *Vedas* well. You have studied *Rig-Veda, Yajur-Veda* and *Sama-Veda*. Yes, you must have studied them. Yes, otherwise will it be possible for any body to talk so perfectly? I think you might have also learnt grammar with a lot of interest. How many times have you read it? It seems you have read it many times. Will any one remember it so well if he reads only once?...I think you talk with others as per the code remembering well Vedas…grammar lessons and every thing. When you utter each word…."

When Rama praised Hanuman that he spoke correctly, he thought differently. But now when the matter entered scriptures and grammar, fear caught him. If asked to recite a verse or line from some Veda? If asked suddenly to explain a conjugation in grammar?...Thank god…In boyhood the teacher broke my back into a thousand pieces but the *stomach did not learn even a single letter*. Except jumping and leaping over walls and streets… no question of explaining any conjugation.

"Ignorant people who don't have the knowledge of grammar exhibit vulgar expressions on their faces while uttering each word. You have not done that. One must be familiar with six qualities to talk pleasantly. It seems you know all of them pretty well."

Hanuman had a blank face. He felt like crying aloud, "I don't know any thing!" What is this? Finally I have landed in grammar! If I kept silent as if knew them and if he asks me to

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254. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 2, slokas 24 & 25; sarga 3, slokas 20 to 23:

Sugriva sent hanuman advising him, "You have to find out about them through mutual conversation. Through their talk, find out their ins and outs." But Hanuman told about Sugriva before others opened their mouth and uttered even a single word and before knowing who they are and what they are! If they were enemies whom Vali in fact sent? Hanuman said every thing, "Sugriva is around here. I am so and so. Sugriva has rivalry with Vali." Nowhere do we find such a stupid envoy as Hanuman. This will become more and more evident hereafter. ★

explain those six qualities?

Rama, in fact, is curious to ask Hanuman what those six qualities are, because he wanted to talk about them if Hanuman cannot answer! The grammar lesson came to his memory well. The lesson is murmuring inside, "Melody, clarity, depth, confidence, fullness and rhythm - all these six qualities must be present while speaking."

Even though Rama is not reciting this lesson, it is *rotating* in his mind. He said, "Hanuman! All your words…originate in the heart in a low voice, enter the larynx, come out in the fourth note, you see."

Hanuman is swallowing his words in a discordant note - from throat to the bottom of the heart into the belly!

Lakshmana's inner voice is *burning with anger*. "When a messenger from Sugriva comes, we have to follow him with great joy. Instead of that what is this talk about Vedas and grammar lessons, voice qualities and low tones? Does he have any sense? What if the messenger talks in pleasant cuckoo notes or donkey's braying tones?...In fact, locating Sugriva is important…See your brother is happier with this discussion of grammar than on locating Sugriva…These fellows who read scriptures are fit for nothing", the inner voice thrashed Lakshmana.

Lakshmana could not raise his voice. "Yes…true…true…", he played second fiddle to his inner voice, thinking that it would get wild if he disagreed with it.

Looking at Lakshmana smilingly, Rama said, "Lakshmana! Will any body not feel happy if some one talks so pleasingly? Even the enemy - who raises his sword to slain - will change his mind, you know! Rama saw mercifully as if he changed his mind to slain Hanuman even though Hanuman was his enemy.

Hanuman turned pale and *looked here and there*. What enemies? What slaying? I have not enquired who these people are and what they are. Alas, will they kill me? Folding his hands, he said, "Sir! Your highness has not revealed your identity. To make friends with you, our king…." He stopped and looked at Rama in humility.

As he watched Hanuman, Rama is pleased with him. As soon as his king has sent him, he came in disguise. He praised them so well that they felt very happy. What a nice messenger! If a king has such a nice messenger! What dearth will be there?...Any major royal mission can be carried out! What kind of messengers had Bharata appointed? When Bharata came to Chitrakuta, I preached him many things, but…about appointing spies over spies - Oh, I forgot only that point. [255]

Recovering from his thought…Rama looked at Lakshmana *serenely*. "Lakshmana! Sugriva's minister wants to talk to us. Talk with him pleasantly and tenderly!", Rama ordered and looked as though said, "I am the king, aren't I? Why should I talk to him. Don't you know this much?" [256]

"Yes, sir!" Lakshmana saluted his brother obediently and turned towards Hanuman. "My brother has heard about your king already! He has come here only to meet your king. My brother will make friends with your king, as you wish." He began conversation.

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[255] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 3, slokas 34 & 35:** "If a king has such a messenger with good qualities to achieve things he will fulfil all affairs", Rama praised. Praising some one who has told a stranger everything without knowing about the others means that Rama is also the same kind of fellow as this messenger. The poet is praising Hanuman with special attention. The praise has no basis. He is only dumping words, "This great, that great, read Vedas, read scriptures, knowledgeable person, good messenger". He is creating an atmosphere so that readers will begin to develop great respect for Hanuman. Hereafter we shall see the greatness of this great man also. ★

[256] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 3, sloka 27:** Rama has all the while been talking about scriptures under the pretext of praising Hanuman. But Lakshmana has to talk about the actual business! It is a disgrace to say it himself. A slave should accompany him and tell about him to the other person. This is a characteristic feature of Masters who exhibit 'feudal pride'. ★

Hanuman felt relieved. "So, these brothers are not Vali's men! Then, why worry? Both of them look like heroes. They may fight with Vali and win. Only if Sugriva becomes king, we can get back our positions as ministers. Hanuman looked at Rama with reverence, "Sir! You…in these thick forests along with your brother…why do you wander…", so saying he stopped.

Rama looked askance at Lakshmana.

Lakshmana began again obediently. "Hanuman! I shall tell you every thing. Listen. A great man called Dasaratha ruled the Kosala kingdom for a long time according to code and justice. He gave in charity and performed great sacrifices and many pious deeds. This great man is the eldest son of that great man. His name is Sri Ramachandra. Perhaps you may not know, but every body else knows this great man. He is the one who saves all creatures. Of all the sons of king Dasaratha, he alone has the best qualities. He is a hero of heroes. He has inherited all the good qualities of our father. He is a valiant man, a knowledgeable man…"

Lakshmana's inner voice flew into a rage and interrupted him saying, "We are mere dunces! Inefficient fellows!...Continue…why have you paused?...Have you no shame? Are you too not the gem like son of that king Dasaratha?"

Lakshmana did not heed the 'chatter' of the inner voice. Giving the answer intended for the inner voice to Hanuman, Lakshmana said, "Listen, Hanuman! Although I am his brother, in my view I am his slave. As I admire all the good qualities of my brother, I have been serving this great man.[257] …That is alright… Listen! My brother, although he is endowed with so many royal features, is deprived of his kingdom. He along with his wife are in exile and are suffering a lot…Have you heard what happened later?", he paused.

"Yes, sir! Continue…", said Hanuman moving two steps ahead with enthusiasm. Wind brought the scent of snuff to Rama. Since Rama is in an exciting situation, he did not care for the wind.

Remembering his sister-in-law, Lakshmana felt sad and continued his narration. "One day, when my great brother and I were not home, my great sister-in-law was abducted by a great Rakshasa…", he stopped suddenly, felt ashamed, got confused, corrected the slip of his tongue. "Most wicked… Ravana… kidnapped … my sister-in-law. My brother who can grasp everything does not know about that Ravana…What can we do? From then on my brother has been wailing non-stop and roaming in the hills and valleys. By the grace of Kabandha, we came to know about your king. We are on the way searching for him." He broke off.

"Who is this Kabandha?", wondered Hanuman puffing out his cheeks.

Lakshmana looked at Hanuman from *top to bottom* in order to find out what his view was.

"My brother is full of hope that Sugriva would help. However much we talk about my brother will be little. He is so great! Formerly our father used to protect all the worlds…Now our brother sir is doing that. He protects the worlds. So much danger befell such a great man" he sighed.

Lakshmana hesitated that it would be improper to talk more about his brother when they were seeking the help of others and so he stopped.

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257. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 4, slokas 5 to 13: See what Lakshmana is saying about Rama. "Hearing the question of Hanuman and prodded by Rama, Lakshmana said that Rama is a very great man…And…Rama is known to ordinary people also. He is a protector of all creatures. He is the most virtuous among all the sons of Dasaratha (*See, these words are uttered by another son!*) Fit to enjoy pleasures. (*This means, except the great people, all are unfit*)…Cultivated by his virtues, I am his slave. (*Lakshmana himself is saying that he is Rama's slave!*) ★

Rama frowned and looked as if saying, "Will you tell him only this much about me? Did I not kill Tataka when I was young?... Redemption of Ahalya from her curse... Breaking the bow of Siva... How many more deeds are there? Why don't you mention even one of them?

Lakshmana, who is not well versed in reading '*the Veda of eye signs*', foiled all the hopes of his brother and looked hopefully at Hanuman.

"Hanuman! You have to convince your king to help my brother! In fact, my brother himself can give riches and wealth...luxuries and fortunes...salvation to all those who ask for them. He gave salvation to Kabandha. He gave salvation to Sabari. If a great king Sugriva gives his word, my brother will *consider it as 'ten thousands'* and be happy.

Hanuman *tightened his mouth* and looked in surprise.

Lakshmana sighed. "What is the use of so much fame? What is the use of doling out alms and doing charitable deeds? In fact...our Raghu dynasty...our grand fathers...our great grand fathers were so renowned, you know? All great scholars in our kingdom applaud that this earth sustain like this because of the virtues of our Ikshwaku dynasty...Now, what can we do?...Such a famous brother of mine has to wander like this! Hanuman! My brother seeks the refuge of Sugriva. Sri Rama is the lord of all the worlds, but Sugriva is his lord!"

Rama found it very difficult to listen this. Is Sugriva his lord?...What is this fate?...If I askew, Lakshmana's trend will change, but...All right!...Let him say! The task should be done somehow or other! Battle with Ravana means...army...treasury...spies...How many things are required! So, we have to seek the help of one or the other...What is the alternative? Inevitable!

By the time Rama recovered from his thoughts, Lakshmana was begging Hanuman holding his hands. "Somehow, this help should come from you! Now, if Sugriva doesn't say 'yes', our brother has no where to turn to! If Sugriva does not save our brother from this sea of sorrow...." Lakshmana shed tears profusely.

Rama turned his face to the other side and was immersed in seeing the beauty of Lake Pampa.

While remembering his sister-in-law, Lakshmana is anxious how they could free her from the captivity of Ravana. Except Sugriva's help, no other way is in sight. With a hoarse voice, Lakshmana said, "Hanuman! Why do I waste so many words? We depend on you to make Sugriva agree graciously to help Sri Rama." Lakshmana let go the hands of Hanuman and wiped his tears.[258]

Hanuman felt depressed in the depths of his heart. He hoped that these were great heroes and would get rid of Vali's menace, but why have things turned this way? They are robust but it seems they don't have the capacity at all. But...what can we say? They must be capable of shooting arrows effectively. They may be of use for something.

"What? What are you thinking about?"

"Oh! No! Should people like you implore

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258. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 4, slokas 17 to 25: Hear, Lakshmana's words to Hanuman. "This lord of all people, Rama, who gives wealth to those who desire it, is willing to accept Sugriva as his lord. Rama who offers refuge to all worlds seeks the refuge of Sugriva. He trusts Sugriva as his saviour. He is seeking the mercy of Sugriva. Sugriva has to show mercy on Rama who is afflicted with grief" - Thus Lakshmana spoke with tears, arousing sympathy.

One who saves the worlds is praying to be saved.

One who protects the worlds is praying to be protected.

One who shows mercy to the worlds is seeking mercy for himself. By saying so, the poet minds his poetic skill only, but has ignored how it belittles Rama's character. Lakshmana is begging Hanuman continuously.

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so much? Our king will certainly help you. He sent me to make friends with you, didn't he? Come, let us go!"

"Brother, sir! Please come!" Lakshmana called his brother, who was immersed in enjoying the beauty of Lake Pampa.

Rama turned his face and looked around.

"It is very difficult to climb this hill!" He waited to follow in the footsteps of Lakshmana.

"Follow me, sir, I shall show you the easier path", so saying Hanuman began to walk in strides on the rocks.

★ ★ ★

To be on the safe side king Sugriva doubting the Rishyamuka mountain also, went to the adjacent cave of Malaya mountain and kept safely his head beneath the heads of his ministers, sat with abated breath - as laid down in political codes.

Hanuman, bringing along with him Rama and Lakshmana, came to Rishyamuka mountain and not finding the king there, came to Malaya mountain, searching in the caves around. Signalling to Rama to wait at a distance from the cave, he said, "Sir! I shall bring over king now. Please sit on these rocks comfortably." He hastened towards the cave.

Seeing the tumult of Hanuman, the heads of ministers whispered to the head of the king, "It seems he has returned." Even before the whispering abated, the king was startled on seeing Hanuman, who had rushed into the cave. "Oh!...It is you?...Feared it might be Vali…", so saying he stopped and turned his face *serenely*. "So…what is the matter?...Who are they?..."

Feeling elated as one who has achieved a great task, Hanuman said, "They are not our enemies, king! I have enquired every thing. I shall tell…" He searched at his waist and though he found nothing, he has not felt disappointed. "Oh! No! we were afraid but they *do not know the nose or face* of Vali. They have come from Dandakaranya. They say, they are sons of Dasaratha. Both of them are brothers. The name of the elder one is Sri Rama. Well read man. Good man. The younger one is Lakshmana. He is very good. He has such reverence for his elder brother…one has to see it to believe it….", he went on narrating. The handsome face of king Sugriva turned furious. "A younger brother has reverence for his elder brother?"

Hanuman realized his mistake. "No, not that! Just talked about Lakshmana! The people of that country might be so! Do I say that you should have reverence for your brother?"

"That is all right! What are those swords? What is this relationship between sages and swords?" Sugriva said furiously as his anger is still unabated.

"That is what I was going to say, king! The thing is, some fellow called Ravana has abducted this Rama's wife! Poor fellows! They too are grieving in difficulties as we are. They have come with great hope seeking your help."

"My help! Oh, No! Haven't you told them that it is not possible? Why do we have all this head ache?"

"No, we should not be so hasty, king! Sri Rama looks like one who knows many things. Well read man. They come from a high family! When such people come and seek refuge, 'You alone are the saviour!'......"

"What? Have they said that I am their saviour?"

"Would I bring them if they hadn't said so? They said, 'Sugriva alone can save us. Sugriva alone can protect us. Sugriva has to show mercy on us. That younger brother held my hands and didn't leave them until I said, "Okay". Let me be frank. I too felt sympathy for them."

"Well…Not to talk about your pity! Did I ask you to find who they are and what the matter is or to bring them along? You seem to be *one who burns the whole thing when asked to watch the thing*", Sugriva said with irritation.

Hanuman felt a little worried that the king would not approve of what he has done.

Tarudu intervened and clinched the matter, "What help exactly should Sugriva give Rama?"

"Have to search for his wife", Hanuman mumbled.

"This is indeed wonderful. Should I go and search for her?..."said Sugriva in anger. "I shall go on searching for the wives of all the fellows in the village; I have only this duty!...Did I ask you to do this?"

Hanuman began to say tactfully in a convincing manner. "Oh, king! It is only for your benefit that I have done this."

"What benefit? Stupid benefit", Sugriva dismissed the entire tact of Hanuman.

"Their swords are like clubs...what friendship can we have with them?" said Sugriva and looked round angrily.

Hanuman, taking the initiative, began to reason with him. "Why should we fear if they have swords, king? Vali should be the one to feel afraid..."

Sugriva sharply frowned and hurled many questions, "What fear for Vali? Why?... How?... When?"

"You ask me like that, I'll tell you. Should we, in fact, defeat Vali or not? Shall we *lie down* on this mountain as long as we live?"

"This is too much. If you like you be...."

"Then, should we not get the help of some big hero or not?"

"So, what?"

"Friendship with Rama...what a might it will be..."

"What strength?...What about those swords?"

"So again, the same chant? What will those swords do to us?"

"Then whom will they harm....?"

"You don't listen to what I say? Suppose, you make friends with Rama. Perhaps Rama may kill Vali, who knows?"

"What! Killing!" Sugriva's face glimmered for a moment and then darkness covered it.

"No! Who can kill Vali?...Humbug...." Sugriva sighed deeply.

"King! What Hanuman says seems to be good", said Tarudu, moving a little to the side of Hanuman.

"Yes, this seems to be good. It seems there is nothing to fear for us" all ministers leaned toward Hanuman.

"What looks good, You stupid fellows!" said Sugriva irritated. "Now, how can that Rama kill Vali?" he put the real, crucial question.

"You ask me 'how'?...Aren't there those arrows?"

Sugriva laughed sarcastically. "With those *arrow sticks* will he kill Vali?...Look! Why all this talk...this is not something that will happen at all. Tell him to search for his wife himself! Tell him quickly. Have you brought them along with you?...First ask them to leave. Tell them to find somebody else to help them. I can't search for his wife, you see... Tell him that...." So saying he hurried up Hanuman.

Hanuman puffed his cheeks up and looked at the king angrily. "Let me ask you, were we not frightened to death at the sight of those arrow sticks?"

Sugriva turned pale and looked as if he were saying, "Yes, so what?"

Looking for an opportunity, Hanuman took the initiative and said, "King! If you first make friends with Rama, later on we can talk of other things with him." Hanuman looked around for a while and whispered in a low tone. "Don't be naive!...Will we help him for nothing? If he kills Vali for our sake, we will search for his wife. Isn't it so? Give and take! So heed my advice..."

"Well, I'll heed...but can he really kill Vali for our sake?"

"First make friends with Rama"

"I shall! But what is the use? Perhaps, later, he may say, 'Why should I kill your enemy?...Will it not be sinful for me?' "

"Oh, no! He is well versed in all codes. He knows perfectly well the anti-dotes for sins. We don't know whether he would say so or not. Why should we have such doubt? Let us see when he says so. When he says so, we shall stop searching for his wife."

"Yes, king! What Hanuman says is right. It is better if you make friends with the king of Kosala", said the ministers who were around.

Sugriva could not say, 'No'. Perhaps Sri Rama might really kill Vali! Well, who can say? Who knows? Who can say, *what sort of a snake there is in a given hole!* All right! As you wish. When all the ministers have advised , let's go. Have you enquired well who they are? There will be no problem, will there be? They are not Vali's men, are they? We have nothing to fear, have we?...." so saying, he put his head out of the cave.

"Trust me, king, I have enquired about everything"

Sugriva turned to Tarudu and said, "To be on the safe side, father-in-law, just keep a watch on that Sri Rama." Then he walked heroically in a swagger, putting out his chest forward.[259]

On seeing Rama, Sugriva was perplexed and stood wondering.

On seeing Sugriva, Rama cast his eyes on the ground, unperturbed and in a serious manner. As soon as he saw Sugriva, Rama had a feeling of revulsion. Sugriva also looked like crude men who are seen daily in the forests. There are jewels and the like on his body but they too are like crude jewels which tribals wear.

Rama found no charm or grace in the face of Sugriva. 'So, this tribal man is king Sugriva? Moreover, is this the gentleman who is going to help me?'

Rama looked at Lakshmana askew as if suggesting, "See how handsome is this king Sugriva!"

Lakshmana looked at Sugriva with respect. "So this man will help my brother" was the feeling of surprise that glimmered on his face.

On seeing Rama and Lakshmana, Sugriva lowered his head in surprise and with respect. Their facial features - *the eyes and the nose* - appealed a lot to Sugriva. Both of them looked very refined and great people. Recollecting what Hanuman said about their forefathers and the renown of their dynasty, Sugriva's respect increased further.

Hanuman intervened and introduced Rama to Sugriva. "Your Excellency! This great man is Sri Rama. He was to rule Kosala. Well versed in all 'Sastras'. He is entangled in danger and seeks your refuge…"

Rama felt utterly disgraced *as if he had been guillotined*. He had thought differently before he saw Sugriva, but now, seeking the help of this tribal man meant…."

Shyly folding his hands, Sugriva said to Rama, "Sir, I have heard everything about you. My minister has told me about you. You are the king of a great country. You are very famous. A well read scholar. Such a great man like you proposing to make friends with a dunce tribal like me…asking for my help…Sir, this is my good luck! My fortune!..." He extended his hand, with some hesitation.

Sugriva's words and humility pleased Rama to some extent. Wavering between likes and dislikes, Rama caught hold of Sugriva's arm involuntarily when Sugriva offered his hand and looked *serene*. Sugriva, not recognizing that seriousness, fell all of a sudden at the feet of Rama and embraced him. It was impossible for Rama to wriggle out of his hold till Sugriva let it off.

Sugriva's ministers collected dry sticks in a hurry and lit a fire. They sat round the fire and blew on it to make it smokeless. Hanuman gathered some flowers and dropped them around the sticks.

Sugriva and Rama walked round the fire. Rama chanted all the verses worshipping god. Watching the pleasure of Sugriva for making friends with him, Rama felt comforted by the action taking place in the presence of fire and as per convention.

Sugriva is in a very joyous mood that friends with such a great man will surely lead to Vali's death.

After walking round the fire, chants, embraces and everything is over, Sugriva looked around, broke off a twig in full blossom, threw it on the ground, pulled Rama, sat him on it and sat beside Rama himself.

Hanuman made a flower seat for Lakshmana also.

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259. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 3, last sloka:

In the beginning, Sugriva did not in fact have any idea of making friends with Rama. He had instructed Hanuman to enquire about them and had not told him to bring them to him. On learning that Rama and Lakshmana were not Vali's followers, Hanuman had got the idea of getting Vali killed by Rama. "Hanuman very much pleased on hearing the words Lakshmana, making up his mind, to get victory over Vali, intended to make Sugriva befriend Rama and Lakshmana." ★

All the ministers of Sugriva gathered round.

"Let us listen to what they talk about", thought the birds and ceased chirping.

"I shall report to you whatever they talk", said Air, promising all the trees at a distance.

"Sir, my elder brother…you know is a very wicked fellow…", Sugriva is anxious to pour out his woes. Rama too is eager to tell them his own sad story. But, he is struggling with the thought, "Will it be proper for me to talk about it or shall I allow Lakshmana to do that."

"Sir, you don't believe if I say. It is lie to you, but true to me. My brother….how wicked he is…"

"Yes, yes!...My step-mother is also such a wretched…"

"I have not committed anything improper, sir!...Just for no fault of mine….me from the kingdom…"

"Well, me too like that….for no reason… I am guiltless…My father…yielding to a woman…."

"I have no face to tell you about it! My brother retaining my wife….unjustly…me…"

"Is there anything just in this world for that matter?...Did Ravana think that she is some one else's woman?...If you actually hear the entire story…"

"If you hear about my plight…your heart will melt…"

"I could not get a wink of sleep, you know! I had ever dreamt that such a horrible thing would befall…"

Lakshmana felt uncomfortable with this attitude. He turned his face hither and thither and looked down the mountain. 'How deep the valleys are! In fact, how could we climb this mountain?' He felt surprised. By the side of the mountain a small rivulet flowed jumping over the rocks. The fragrance of the *Karaka* flower is roaming riotously along with the wind.

Hanuman is suddenly reminded of the snuff of the Karaka leaf and searched again at his waist. As nothing came to hand, he fumbled at the waist of Nila and found a piece of cigar. He lit it in the dying god of fire. Fire and cigar made friends. Fragrance and wind made friendship. Nila who was till then keeping his temptation under control drew a deep breath and put his hand into his waist band. Tarudu's hand was fumbling there and it made friends with Nila's hand. That way, it made the waist band of Nila empty.

"They are smoking cigars", said the wind to the entire forest.

"They mean, who are they?...Rama too?" asked trees and birds in surprise.

The wind ran away ignoring the question.

By the time Lakshmana's attention came back to original position from valleys and rivulets, Sugriva was talking. Rama has given up talking, left the *field* to Sugriva and was listening silently.

"Rama, I am spending my time on this mountain" said Sugriva and suddenly caught both the hands of Rama. "You have to give me word that you will protect me from fear of that wicked fellow!...I have heard that you are a great hero. *These are not hands*", so saying, he pressed Rama's hands tightly.

Rama was struggling with arguments and counter arguments within himself about the political sphere for some time.

Though Sugriva is not saying explicitly, his intention is killing Vali. If Vali is killed…. Sugriva will become the king. If Sugriva becomes king he will get an army, treasury and power into his hands. Without them it is not possible to fight with Ravana. That means: "To fight with Ravana, army is needed. If the army is required, Sugriva must become king. If Sugriva has to become king, Vali has to die. If we wish him to die, will he die when he is in an *imperishable condition*? But some how I must kill him. Sugriva will become king, only if Vali dies. Only if Sugriva becomes king….While Rama was thinking only about this, his conscience came forward muttering and standing obediently and said, "I am asking just casually, you know!...Now, the army… treasury… every thing is ready in the hands of Vali, isn't it?...Then, killing Vali and getting all those for Sugriva…then fulfilling our task…why all this?....By then it will be late. Now, you can ask Vali for help just as you have asked Sugriva!...You can make friends with Vali, can't you?...So, for this much, why kill Vali?...Oh, no!

I am just asking as I have a doubt, that's all!" Rama's conscience bent its back and stood aside.

Rama looked *serenely* in some direction. "Yes, I know you will question me like this. I shall tell you everything. You are asking me, 'why I have to kill Vali only for this much? Actually, in politics there are no principles or rules of 'this much' or 'that much'. There is only one principle, namely, 'will we benefit or not from the action - however small it may be - that we perform!' Suppose, we make friends with Vali himself, as you say. What is the guarantee that a fellow, who is in a greater position than us, will make friends with us?...Even if he makes friends with us, what is the certainty that he will give the help which we ask for?...We don't know the kind of relationship between Vali and Ravana. Whether or not Vali will come forward to fight Ravana? We should think about all these things, shouldn't we?" Rama began a conversation with his soul in a calm manner.

"Well, if we try to find out through some one who will ask him on our behalf? We had done so in the case of Sugriva?"

"All right! Suppose Vali helps us as you say. But thereafter I will have to be grateful to Vali for ever, wouldn't I?...There isn't anything that I can do for him in return for his help, isn't it?...But in the case of Sugriva it is not so. I shall help Sugriva first. I shall kill Vali and handover the kingdom to him. Then, Sugriva will be grateful to me forever. If he renders help in fighting Ravana tomorrow, it will be his help in return. Subsequently also, Sugriva will be under my control. That means, Kishkindha kingdom will be under the control of the Kosala kingdom. Suppose I get help from Vali. Then the whole thing will be the other way round. Sri Rama will have to be subservient to Vali for ever!...What do you say, yes or no?"

"Yes, but… yet… but… If you kill Vali… the world… "

"Yes, it will be somewhat of a problem with the world. That is what I think. I think that I may find some morals from the Vedas."

"What? Do Vedas contain morals that say, 'There is nothing wrong even if one kills another person'?"

"There aren't such morals but….it seems there are some good morals in *Manu's Law*. I remember two slokas that will be useful to us in this context. In fact, Manu's law is our own law, isn't it?"

"So, is it decided to kill Vali?"

"Can't help. What can I do? May be he is destined so, that is why I get that thought! How will my action be wrong?... All is Fate… I am only instrumental! I shall tell the world so. Otherwise, would you ask me to live serving Vali as a refugee all my life? How much foresight should we have before doing anything! We should not think that it is enough if something is finished now. We should be able to reap the benefit in future also by our present action."

"Then what about this serving fathers by sons and elder brothers by younger ones in reverence? Is Lakshmana not serving you? In the same manner, should not Sugriva too serve you with reverence? If the younger brother plans to get the elder brother killed, how horrible it will be? How sinful!"

"See, the horrors and sins apply only to the civilized Raghu dynasty and not to uncivilized *Vanaras* (monkey tribe). Why do you bother me as if I don't know what is just and what is unjust?"

"Yes, yes! Not that you are not aware of all these things. Actually, what morals are there unknown to you in this world? But…Let it be so…If we bring both the brothers together? If you send Lakshmana to Vali and talk to him, Vali may heed?...Then both of them will help us anyway. There may be no need to kill any one."

"I'll get angry if you give such suggestions. If both of them join together their strength will increase. Even then I will have to be obedient to Vali for his help? I cannot bear the idea of being obedient to another king. How foolish it will be to forego the chance when a kingdom is about to fall in our hands? Whatever I do, I do it thoughtfully. I am the one who has read all Sastras! Why do you doubt me at every point?"

"Oh, no!...Just…"

"Tell me correctly. Is not my thinking just?"

"Why not? You know all *Dharmas* (justice, duty, virtue)"

"Do you say that really? Do you approve it?"

"Yes...All right!...As you please"

As Rama, who was immersed in deep thought and has turned his head to a side, Sugriva was dumbfounded and let go off Rama's hands and sat turning pale.

Rama recovered from his thoughts and said with a smile, "Sugriva, is not helping one another the duty of friends? Vali is the wicked fellow who has abducted your wife. That is why, I'll kill him. Rest assured." Rama nodded his head.[260]

As he could not believe his own ears, Sugriva looked at Hanuman's ears with a hope as if was asking, "Is it true?...Killing Vali! What did you hear?"

Hanuman looked at the ears of Tarudu. Tarudu....

In his eagerness to instill full confidence in Sugriva, Rama said, "Sugriva! You are not aware of the potency of my arrows. They are like Indra's diamond weapon! Rama's arrow never misses a target...why waste so many words? You will yourself watch while your brother rolls on the ground pierced in his heart by my sharp arrows." Rama *serenely* smiled.

Sugriva is unable to sit steadily in his over joy. 'What? Killing Vali? So, I'll be the king of Kishkindha? It seems the task will be accomplished. This man seems to be an adept archer. If hit with arrows.... Vali and Vali's *grand father too* will fall down?' Sugriva suddenly caught hold of Rama's hands.

Ramayya! If such a thing happens by your grace, *I shall not keep my debt to you uncleared* and I shall return your favour! If I get back my wife...of course kingdom too...That is all right! Then...when will you kill Vali?...Of course, there is no hurry. Alright, let him live for a while. That wicked fellow is very arrogant. I will also see how long he will survive?" so saying Sugriva pulled out the flower twig that was pinching under his buttocks and not letting him sit properly. Rama, who sat on the same twig, slid down at once, frowned and adjusted himself.

For Lakshmana, it did not seem proper that Rama had talked of killing Vali. 'He should know clearly why there was a quarrel between the brothers and who was in the right? There is nothing wrong in befriending Sugriva. Also it is not a matter of shame to seek his help. But... just because of that... to promise him to kill his enemy... what was all that... well, brother knows everything...'

Looking respectfully at Rama and nodding his head, Sugriva said, "Rama! I have heard about all your hardships...Hanuman has told me everything...Believe me, I felt so sad that *my belly sunk*. Now you need not fear. Don't worry about your wife. You are not aware of my strength. Take my word, it is my responsibility to search all over the world and get back your wife...But you should...my wife...without fail.."

"Sugriva it is my burden to get back your wife! Don't worry! But somehow...you have to...for my wife..."

"Rama! Forget about your wife, I shall take care of all that. Whether she is in the skies or in the nether world, I am here to bring her back...

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260. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 5, slokas 26 to 50:

Without the knowledge of the reason for the hostility of Vali and Sugriva Rama said, "I'll kill Vali. He also gave the reason for his decision, "I'll kill Vali who has abducted your wife". Can we assume thus, "What more reasons are to be known? Rama knows that Vali abducted Sugriva's wife and drove him out of the kingdom. That is why, he promised so." But after some time, (in **sarga 8, sloka 42**), Rama says, "Sugriva! I want to listen in detail the reason for your enmity with Vali. Listening to all that, I shall weigh the strength and weakness and help you." Now he wants to listen in detail about the reason for enmity. Will he promise him help after hearing the story or hear the story after promising him help? To know whether or not Rama is selfish in killing, one has to decide depending on the reasons that Rama gives for killing Vali. If the reasons are 'just', it means that there is no fault in Rama's decision. We will see those reasons later. ★

But my wife… somehow… It is your burden….”

“Take my word!... Sugriva!...When I am here to rescue your wife…”[261]

Roaming from tree to tree, the wind is loudly announcing, “All the while we have been under the impression that men abduct others' wives…But…see these two great men! How enthusiastic they are to rescue others' wives!”

The trees slowly nodded their heads, “Do you know why there is so much enthusiasm?...Because they are others' wives. When it is not possible for them to abduct others' wives, they fulfill their enthusiasm by doing some thing with regard to those women. Oh!...Seen so many such people! What is there new to us with regard to these human beings! Whether they protect or punish others' wives, these men do whatever benefits them and not out of mercy for other women.”

“Wait, let me see what they are doing”, said the wind and ran away.

Recollecting everything, Sugriva told Rama something. “…One Rakshasa… some time ago… we saw him abducting a woman. He must be Ravana… Didn't we see him?” He asked the ministers.

“Why one only! We saw many women being abducted”

“Why only one Ravana? We saw many Ravanas abducting. Oh! So many times! Who can remember?”

“Let that be! Why bother about all others?...While Ravana was carrying her away, that woman cried, “Rama! Lakshmana!” Did we hear it? Rama! That woman might be your wife…Alas! I have forgotten the most important thing. That great woman dropped a bundle of ornaments to our side while she was crying! We have kept it in safe custody from then onwards. Just wait, I will get it.” Sugriva jumped into the cave in two strides and returned with the bundle in one stride.

Rama opened the bundle eagerly and saw the ornaments. They are all Sita's ornaments. Even the piece of cloth with which the bundle was made, was Sita's saree. Yellow silk saree! She might have torn the end and made a bundle with it!

Rama felt as if he has seen Sita for a moment. Decorated in those ornaments, wearing that saree…that day, standing in front of the cottage…Sita running behind the deer…This scene he felt. Rama shut his eyes and leaned against the rock.

Lakshmana bowed his head shed tears.

“Lakshmana! My lad!...See, here is your sister-in-law. See my lad!” said Rama and spread the ornaments on his chest.

Lakshmana wiped his tears in haste to console his brother. “Brother, sir! I cannot recognize whether these shoulder ornaments and ear ornaments are my sister-in-law's or not. But these anklets are surely hers. I remember them well. I used to bow to them every day”, he said and bowed to the anklets.[262]

Rama slowly got up, placed all the ornaments near by and asked Sugriva in tears,

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[261] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 5, sloka 27:** Rama to Sugriva: “I'll kill Vali who abducted your wife. I shall see you get back your wife.”

Sarga 6, slokas 5 to 8: Sugriva to Rama: “Rama! I shall get back your wife. You will cast off the agony of separation from your wife. Even if she is in the nether world or in the skies, I shall get back your wife.”

Neither of the fellows can rescue his own wife. But boast of protecting the others' wives! ★

[262] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 6, sloka 22:** “I do not know Sita's shoulder ornaments. Nor have I seen her ear rings. I know well her anklets”, says Lakshmana. Lakshmana is talking as if he has not seen Sita's face. But Lakshmana describes the beauty and glamour of Sita on many occasions. For example, in **Aranya kanda, sarga 45, sloka 34,** Lakshmana says, “The lady with beautiful face! The lady with beautiful eyes!” This is how he speaks at many more places. This means, he has seen her nose and face but not ears and shoulders!

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"Sugriva! In what direction did that wicked Rakshasa go, my friend?"

Sugriva thought for a while, turned his head side ways and said, "Towards the South…." Then he looked at his ministers as if asking them, 'Didn't he?' "

"Yes, towards South", said Hanuman and Nala.

"Not towards South, was it not towards North?" said Tarudu opposing South.

Nila stretched his legs towards the East and dozed, kept silent not taking South or North side.

"He went in the direction of those *Ippa* trees, you know? Do you call it north or south? Where, you think, the sun rises?" so saying Sugriva lifted his head. The clouds are so thick that it is difficult to find out where the sun is.

Looking in that direction, Lakshmana confirmed Sugriva's opinion, "If it is this way it is the south."

Feeling disappointed, Tarudu said, "Since the time we have come to this mountain, I have lost the sense of directions totally. In Kishkindha I can point the directions closing my eyes." He closed his eyes and opened them again.

Finally they resolved that Ravana had gone South.

Looking at all the jewels, Rama grieved, "Sugriva! That wicked fellow…was he tormenting that chaste woman, my lad?...How was he carrying her?"

"He had forcibly embraced her. Like this…" Sugriva picked up a flower twig which he had thrown away a while earlier, embraced it and tried to demonstrate.

By then Rama had swooned to the floor. "No, he did not embrace her like that. He had kept her under his arm and dragged her. Didn't I see it well?...Of course, I did not care much for it", said Hanuman.

Rama rose slowly. "He put her under his arm and embraced her. Ask my uncle. He was then by my side", argued Sugriva.

"I do not know why, I forget every thing I see since the time I have come to this mountain. Yes…That Ravana?...Yes…Rama's wife?...He had caught hold of her tightly, he circled his hand round her waist…otherwise would she not have slipped down? He should hold her with a hand round the waist…He held her well and tightly."

Rama's head reeled and he swooned again.

Everybody had tears in their eyes, being unable to bear Rama's grief. Lakshmana sat depressed, fanning his brother with a flower twig.[263]

Rising from his faint, Rama shouted in wrath, "Lakshmana! I shall kill that wicked fellow. He has caused me lot of grief. He has

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→ "It is wrong on the part of a brother-in-law to see a sister-in-law's face" was the view point of the poet, so he attempted to depict Lakshmana as an ideal brother-in-law who has never seen the *nose or face* of his sister-in-law. All right. But, can the poet make the same brother-in-law utter, "Lady with a beautiful face'? But, Lakshmana has been searching for Sita even when he used to go to fetch water or fruits and also when he was alone, hadn't he? How can he recognize her even if she appears? Never had he seen her face and that! Perhaps he may recognize her looking at her feet! ★

263. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 6, slokas 8 to 10: Sugriva tells Rama, "I saw a woman shining luminantly in the lap of Ravana crying, 'Rama! Lakshmana!', abducted by sinner Ravana…Seeing me with others on the mountain, she dropped the ornaments in a bundle" - So, everybody saw Ravana carrying away a woman and that woman was crying. But they did not care for it as if it were not their business. This Sugriva, Hanuman and everybody could fly like Ravana. Moreover they are great heroes too. But remained indifferent! They did not attempt even a bit to rescue a woman. Now Sugriva is boasting, "I shall rescue Sita and bring her back wherever she may be". Why did he not go forward to save a crying woman? Because there would have been no benefit for him by saving people who were not his concern. ★

angered me too. No, I will not let him go without killing him. Sugriva, tell me where that wicked fellow is? I cannot tolerate it any longer. I will send him to *Yama*'s world (hell). Tell me, where he is!" He saw Sugriva, reddened. "Alas! I have heard about that wicked fellow, but I do not know where he is!"

"Don't you know? But Kabandha said that you know every thing?"

"Who is Kabandha?"

"Well, this is too much. You ask, who that Kabandha is. Kabandha is Kabandha. Who else he will be? When he told us that you know every thing about Ravana, we started searching for you, didn't we?" Rama slowly bundled the ornaments and kept them under his thigh.

Sugriva looked at Rama hesitantly. 'What is this? He is getting angry while I am hoping for him to kill Vali! Who is that rascal Kabandha?' Sugriva felt terribly wrathful of that Kabandha.

"Rama, I don't know who that Kabandha is or Ravana is? Somebody who dislikes me - why somebody, it must be my brother - must have sent that fake Kabandha to you…That fellow must have groused against me to you. Forget about all that. Rama, I told you that it is my responsibility to search for your wife and locate her, didn't I? I swear that I shall kill Ravana and get back your wife for you. Is it all right? …Then you will know what my strength is!"

"Alas! Sita! How long can I be in this sea of sorrow…alone…"

Lakshmana kept quiet thinking that Sugriva is there to console Rama.

"Ramayya! Bear the grief. My wife too is separated from me, as yours. But have I wailed about it? My only thought is, 'how can I get rid of the menace of Vali, My god!' Before every thing, a hero must be bold. Otherwise, how can we accomplish things?" Sugriva is diffident that his ministers may whisper about his own courage. Not looking at them, he went on boldly, "Rama, of what purpose is a man *whose face is always crest fallen*? Of what use is weeping except wasting one's life? Be bold Rama! Grieving is not good."

Rama frowned reluctantly. 'What? This tribal man preaches me morals? Am I grieving for lack of boldness? I am grieving out of my love for my wife'. He looked at Lakshmana as if saying irritably, "Why don't you console me when I grieve so much?"

Sugriva continued again. "I know you are a great hero. I am saying all this just because I am unable to bear your sorrow but I am not qualified to tell you. You should no longer shed tears. It will be a curse on me! Should a hero ever feel disappointed?"

Sugriva knew everything about courage and bravery, just to preach others.

"Alas!...Sita!...My beloved! When can I see you?" so saying Rama wiped his nose and face with his *dhoti*. The ornaments poked his thigh and so he pulled out the bundle and tied it tightly, fell into a doubt. There must be many more ornaments. How many did she remove, how many did she keep with her? I can't know unless I ask her. Sugriva may have returned all that he found…But, we can't be sure. A fellow who intends to kill his brother…on finding gold…even if Sugriva doesn't have that character…Will Hanuman or somebody else…would they not retain even an ear ring? Well, we don't know. We can't trust. - Rama finished tying the bundle and kept it by his side. "Sugriva…since you are very noble, you have said what has to be said when a friend is in difficulty. When all of you implore so much, why should I grieve, my friend? Can every body get a friend like you? Never in such a difficult situation as this. Now, we should hurry up to search for that Ravana…Tell me quickly, what do I have to do for you! Have you noticed that any crop will yield a good harvest in a fertile land? Similarly I can also do any thing. Don't think I am exaggerating or boastful. I have never uttered a single lie since I was born…nor will I in future", Rama looked *serene*.[264]

"Once born as a human, it is inevitable that one will lie. What will happen even if one lies", Hanuman said in a low voice, and stretched his body yawning. Sugriva too was about to yawn.

Rama looked at Lakshmana from the corners of his eyes, as if suggesting, "Are you listening to the words of these tribal fools?"

"Sugriva! What can I do for you…." Rama paused.

Sugriva felt elated, but concealing it and showing dejection said, "Ramayya! What should I say?...You know everything… If I have your grace, all gods will be on my side. How great my position will be among my kith and kin, when I make friends with a king of the Raghu dynasty! It doesn't look proper if I talk about myself, but my courage will not faulter, as is the case with great heroes like you." His courage faltered to look at Hanuman and so he turned his face behind Rama.

There he found two sparrows causing suspicion, "Are these in disguise!", he felt like whispering in the ears of Nila who was by his side. But, Nila stretched himself at the rock, slanted on Sugriva and was snoring.

Getting irritated by Nila's snoring, Sugriva moved on to Rama and remembered his anger at his elder brother.

"…Did he not drive me and my ministers out? Has he not kept my wife with him? But was he satisfied himself with that? He imprisoned all those who were on my side. Did he stop with that? ……Damn! You fellow, you fall on me however much I move aside! I am talking business with a gentleman here and now you doze off….?" Sugriva fulminated against Nila, who is in comfortable sleep. Sugriva himself controlled his yawn with much effort.

Rama is fascinated on hearing how well Vali is governing. Yes, one must do like that in the case of enemies. It is not enough to imprison them. We have to check whether the watchman at the prison is trustworthy or not. One should appoint spies over those watchmen. Does Vali know all this or not?

"….Has he left me peacefully even here? He sent many soldiers to fight against me. Of course, my ministers and I could drive them away some how. In fact, we thought Vali himself had sent you also. A gripping fear begins as soon as we wake up from sleep, suspecting danger every moment. This Hanuman and others are *protecting me like eyelids.* If I have to move a foot, these people go ahead. They sit round me, wherever I sit. They will be my ministers when I become king, won't they? By the bye, what I want to tell you is…." - a yawn is about to burst from the navel of Sugriva making the whole mouth bigger. He contained it again somehow and looked angrily at Nila again.

"Look here *Maamaa*! (Father-in-Law!) Tell Nila, when he wakes up, that the king was very angry. If ministers doze like this, our rule turns funny" said he in anger to his father-in-law.

"Yes, sir! Shall I warn him, waking him up now, your Excellency?"

"No. Let's see when he wakes up…I will reprimand him severely. Don't snooze yourself", said Sugriva and turned towards Rama. "Ramayya! I cannot be free of this misery as long as my brother is happy! My troubles will leave me when that wicked fellow pegs out. I shall be at peace only when he dies. So, what else can I tell you?...I have poured out everything - whatever there is in my heart - before you without shy. It is in your hands to bail me out…or let me drown."

Rama fell into thought on hearing not only about Vali's wisdom but also of his 'strength'. Not being aware of Vali's valour and all that...promising to kill…All right!...Could proceed after careful consideration…. "Sugriva! Tell me why did Vali and you become enemies?...I should know what really happened, shouldn't

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264. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 7, sloka 22: Rama had a doubt that Sugriva might think his words are lies. That is why he says, "I have never uttered a lie. Nor will I utter and in future. I swear to you on truth." He is eager to convince Sugriva.

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I? Not that I am not angry with Vali…but just tell me what really happened."

Sugriva is dumbstruck. He looked at Hanuman as if he was asking, "Will he say 'no' after hearing it out?"

"Why will he say so?...If he says so how can he get his wife back?" replied Hanuman with his eyes.

Sugriva gathered courage and began, "Rama! I shall narrate every thing in detail. Listen."

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"The kingdom of Kishkindha was my father's. Vali is my elder brother. For some reason my father was more fond of my elder brother. I too, of course, was very fond of him. After my father passed away, my brother became king. Rama! I don't understand the matter…why do they say that the kingdom be passed to the eldest son? Can't they give it to all the sons? If they give it to only the eldest son…then….the younger son….Oh!...." Sugriva suddenly shut his mouth and touched his buttock. Hanuman's *nails measured the depths of* Sugriva's *buttock* saying, "See, your buttock is this deep!" *Whenever* Sugriva *sinks in the danger of flood of this talk, these nail boats save* him.

Sugriva realized his mistake. He remembered that Rama also is the eldest son of his father and *bit his tongue.* "….Yes, yes! Younger one comes later than the elder one any way! That's why I served my brother obediently", he continued.

"You know what happened once?...." He paused. Looking at Hanuman, he reddened his eyes as if questioning him, "I shall be careful in my talk. But why do you pinch me so hard? He turned his head towards Rama, "so…how far have I narrated….?'

"You said what happened once."

"Yes, yes…What happened you know…There was a fight between a Rakshasa called Mayavi and my brother."

"What for?"

"What for?... There may be fight for anything. We heard it was for a woman. We do not know the truth…that Mayavi was the son of Maya. Maya had another son called Dundubhi. I am coming to that! I shall tell you that also."[265]

One day Mayavi came at midnight and challenged my brother to a battle. On hearing shouts, my brother got infuriated and went to fight with him... "What is this battle at midnight?" the womenfolk and I dissuaded him. However much we persuaded him, would my brother listen to us? He was very adamant. As there was no way out, I too followed my brother. That Mayavi was frightened on seeing my brother and took to his heels. Don't know why he came to fight any way, coward! Are you listening Rama? That fellow ran and ran and finally rushed into a cave. 'How long will he be there? He will come out any way', we thought and waited. But he would not come out, however long it was! My brother was aflame with anger and said, "I'll myself go inside and see his end, you stay here." He rushed into the cave without caring for the consequences. He is a very brave fellow indeed! Thereafter, I sat near the cave for a long time, worrying that danger may befall my brother. After some days, blood began to flow out of the cave. When I kept my ear to the cave, there was shouting, cries, blows!

My brother was moaning with pain. That Rakshasa was shouting with joy. I am telling the truth. Well, I heard like that. Rama, I abjure on my life if my word is false. Tell me, do I tell lies to you?...When my brother was wailing, that wicked fellow was roaring like a lion. I heard it like that, I swear on the truth." Sugriva paused,

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265. Mandodari is Ravana's wife, isn't she? Her father is this Maya. Her brothers are these Mayavi and Dundubhi. This we will come to know in **Uttara kanda (sarga 12, slokas 13 & 19).** Battle means nothing but beating one another. These were fights that began in the primitive times. At a time when there were no weapons, human bodies themselves were weapons. ★

unable to understand whether Rama believed him or not.[266]

"Sugriva! Tell me what happened later.", asked Rama with *serene* smile.

"What happens, Rama? Hearing those cries and all that, I thought my brother had died. I wept for a while and *turned my heart into a stone*. Fearing that Mayavi would come out if I sat there, I kept a big boulder at the entrance of the cave. Crying and shedding tears continuously, I returned to Kishkindha. But, I did not tell anybody that my brother had died. Hanuman and some others saw my sorrow…Sensed the actual fact. "How can a kingdom go on without a king?" so they said they would make me the king. 'I don't want any kingdom', I cried. But, would these ministers listen to me?....What else could I do? If I declined it after my brother had gone…what would happen to the people? How troublesome it would have been for them! So, I had no other way, except to bow to the welfare of the people.

As my fate would have it, I occupied the throne and in no time, that pleasure did not last even for ten years, my elder brother returned, after killing Mayavi.

I, who was on the throne….why recount all that…how angrily he looked at me!...Oh! If I recollect those eyes!" saying this Sugriva moved towards Hanuman.

Rama moved a bit back.

Lakshmana asked curiously, "What happened then?"

Sugriva adjusted his legs and hands carefully and closely and continued, "What happens? I recouped my strength and bowed to my brother, you know!...See, he could bless me to *live for a thousand years* considering me his younger brother since I saluted to him? No, he stood fulminating as *if I had stolen his father's treasure*…What could I do?...Utter confusion! Nothing occurred to me. Some ministers signalled to me, to remove something from my head. But I didn't remember what there was on my head! When I noticed, it was the crown! Then I realized and removed that crown, and kept it at his feet! Yet, do you think his wrath abated? No! I implored to him in many ways, "Brother, by the grace of god, you have returned safely after killing the enemy. It is enough for me. As soon as I saw you I was so glad that my *belly was full.*" I told him what had actually happened. "I felt very sad….grieved…that you had passed away and kept a boulder at the front of the cave and I returned. On coming back these ministers compelled me saying, 'To conquer other kingdoms without kings, we should have a king, so….' They forced me however much I resisted. They decorated me with jewels and all that…put the crown on and all that and…they insisted I sit on the throne. In fact I told them that I would not sit on it at all. Brother, in fact a fellow like you should be the king…My foot, me the king! No! As you were not there, I sat on the throne for a while… Wouldn't I return you your kingdom? Don't be angry with me!" thus I *begged him touching his feet and fingers*. I saluted him. No,….did he listen to a single word? Did he believe me? He pooh-poohed me. He cast away all my salutations. He summoned all the ministers who had made me king. He called

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266. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 9, sloka 18: "The sound of the Rakshasa making a roar like that of a lion reached my ears. The sound of my brother crying in the face of defeat reached my ears", says Sugriva. He heard as if the Rakshasa had shouted with joy and his brother cried out in agony, he says! The whole 'value of the character of Sugriva' is dependent on whether Sugriva spoke the truth or lies in this respect. Rama got ready to help Sugriva in the belief that Sugriva was right, didn't he? So, Rama's honesty too is dependent on the truth and untruth of this incident. Sugriva would hear only if Vali cried in defeat, wouldn't he? If it is proved that Vali did not at all cry and what Sugriva said was a lie, Sugriva will be a cheat. Then Rama will also be a cheat since he stood in support of Sugriva even after knowing the deception of Sugriva. - See later the truth and untruth in what Sugriva said.

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all the elders in the town. Of course, some of them took to their heels on learning that Vali had come back.

Then he conducted a trial in front of all the people, as if I had committed a crime. He began to tell them. "All of you know that the Rakshasa challenged me to a combat? When I started, this vile fellow also followed me. At that time I thought he was coming along with me out of affection. As soon as the Rakshasa rushed into the cave, I said, 'I shall go in and put an end to him. He might escape from me and come out. Stay at the entrance and catch that fellow if he comes out'. And I went in. It took a long time to search for that fellow. Finally I beat him and his relatives to death. When I came out I found a big boulder blockading the entrance. How many times I shouted, "Brother! Brother!'... Was he there to reply to me? Somehow I came out....kicking, pushing, bashing and moving that boulder. The affair here is like this...in this manner. That Rakshasa ran away in fear as soon as he saw me. But, my brother says he thought that such a coward had killed me! I did not at all cry in pain. How could he hear my voice crying in pain?" - In this manner my brother raised non-sensical questions and blamed me", Sugriva paused and looked at the faces of the people around him to find out if they believed him or Vali.

Hanuman was searching inadvertently at his waist now and then for something and finding nothing and feeling irritated. "He brought unnecessary headache. He rubbed this plight on people who were living comfortably trusting Vali", Hanuman felt irritated in his heart. In that irritation, he asked Sugriva afresh in astonishment, when Sugriva stopped saying. "Yes, Vali questioned well. If the dead one was the Rakshasa, why would Vali shout in pain? How did you think that it was Vali who had moaned?"

Sugriva was dumbstruck and looked as if asking, "Are you Hanuman or some one else in disguise?"

Hanuman looked at Tarudu angrily and touching his own buttocks said "No...I know everything, king! Do you know why I have asked? Rama or Lakshmana might put the same question. Just to know what reply you would give...That's all." He moved away from Tarudu.

Sugriva felt slighted and said, "What reply would I give, the hell! I heard the shouts like that I shall tell everybody who questions me the same." He *folded his mouth* in annoyance.

Nodding his head Rama said, "Tell me what happened later, Sugriva! What fault of yours is there in this situation? Tell me all. I'll decide between the right and wrong." He said *serenely*.

Bowing to Rama with abundant confidence, Sugriva said, "Rama! You are a great man. You can grasp what is just and what is unjust...what else is there to tell...In that way my brother heaped all sorts of blame on me. He blamed me saying that I planned to snatch away his kingdom. That I tried to imprison him in the cave and kill him. 'Shall I allow this ungrateful wretch to stay in my kingdom even for a day?', he roared. He threw some ministers who had helped me behind bars at once. He exiled me and some others from the kingdom. He chased us lest we return to the kingdom. These four and I ran away together. We in the front and that wicked fellow behind us...non-stop running! In the course of our running, we could see the entire world. Finally Hanuman remembered about Rishyamuka. He reminded me that Vali could not come near here. Of course, that was a different story. 'Thank god', we said to ourselves. From then on we are here, near Kishkindha...on this mountain...we have been living....Facing innumerable difficulties. I am worried about the separation from my wife. If my wife were beside me! I don't want any luxuries or wealth...Ugh!" he touched his buttock and looked angrily at Hanuman. 'What blunder have I made', he fell in thought.

Rama was about to ask, "Is not your wife chaste? Did she not offer to accompany you?" But seeing Sugriva's face, he kept quiet nodding his head thinking thus, "Ugh! How can she be chaste *with this sort of handsome figure*?"

By then Sugriva had realized his mistake. He said that no treasures were required, if his wife were with him. If Rama said, "All right, I will talk to Vali and get your wife back", how terrible it would be! Without a kingdom, I *have to remain crying* like this in these mountains for ever, haven't I? - Sugriva is fascinated to see the nails of Hanuman…sharp…long…like swords…how charming are those nails! I have to make Hanuman the main minister.

Rama is wondering at the steadfastness and cleverness of Vali for a long time. It is impossible for Sugriva to get the kingdom as long as Vali is alive. It is also impossible to get his work done if Sugriva doesn't get the kingdom. He has to kill Vali even for his own interest if not for the sake of Sugriva. The hostility between these brothers will benefit me. When Sugriva becomes the king, he will behave with humility and obedience as my tributary. What will be the benefit to me if I show mercy to Vali?....Accomplishing this task as planned, fighting with Ravana and keeping that kingdom also under my control…Yes! I should achieve that also. - Rama's *face blossomed* with fresh enthusiasm.

"Rama! So you have heard everything. I have not done anything wrong. See how many difficulties I have faced…Not that I cannot kill my brother. I am also a great hero. I am wavering about killing *him who was born along with me*. That is it. If any one else kills him, I shall remain indebted to them. Rama! by killing that wicked fellow, you should make me free from his terror"[267], said Sugriva and held Rama's hands.

Rama saw with a solemn smile. "I have heard everything. There is no fault of yours. Vali is a wicked fellow who has abducted another's wife. I shall not let him off without killing him. Both of us face the same difficulty. Your misery and my misery are not different. *Your wife and my wife are not different.* I shall get rid of the affliction of Vali for you. Don't worry", he said.

Feeling elated as if he has just now ascended the throne, Sugriva said, "Yes, Rama! You are very great. I know it. Even Indra cannot stand before your valour. What to say about Vali? You will *burn the worlds* if you get angry…yes, Hanuman has told me". He looked at Hanuman.

Puffing out his cheeks, Hanuman looked as if he was saying, "This is too much. When did I say so?"

"Are we unaware of anything with regard to Sri Rama? He will surely kill Vali. I will be the king again and you will be ministers again!" - While feeling glad over and over again, Sugriva's face suddenly turned less bright. 'I am feeling so elated…but…is Vali an ordinary fellow?...for the hell of it! How has he got such strength…Can these arrows and such do any thing to him? They may bounce off *like broom stick pieces* hitting his chest! Sugriva felt very depressed. "Rama! A word between you and me. …That wicked fellow is terribly strong, you know! …Of course, you are stronger than he is. No, not for that. Just to be on the safe side for you to know about Vali…you know where he offers his morning prayers even before dawn?...Not at howe…He goes round the four directions, offers prayers in the oceans… returns home by sunrise. You know, with what he plays? Not with balls, but with mountains! He will fly the mountains afloat like marbles and catch them. He pulls out great trees in forests as if they were blades of grass", he said.

Rama within Rama threw all his serenity aside and began to wonder, "Oh! My god! My god!"

Lakshmana is listening to what Sugriva is saying as if he has no belief in those words.

Hanuman - we don't know when he rose up - is searching for some leaves and plucking them.

Sugriva is lost in the enthusiasm of describing Vali's valour. "You know, what

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267. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 9, sloka 24: Thinking that others may not consider him a hero, Sugriva says, "Though I have strength to oppose that sinner, I do not have the inclination since I have respect for him as my elder brother". He says he did not oppose Vali and defeat him because of his respect for his brother. But he could get that brother killed by a conspiracy. He would not kill but get him killed. What a shameful talk!

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happened once, Rama?...You know that tricky Mayavi! His elder brother called Dundubhi went to quarrel with the lord of the sea. *Beating* his own *thighs*, he challenged the sea lord, "I shall see what your greatness is. Come on, fight with me, sea lord!"

"What quarrel with the lord of sea?" Rama became curious. He had heard such charming and interesting stories in childhood from sage Viswamitra. He could not hear such stories again. "So did the Lord of the sea kill Dundubhi?" he asked enthusiastically.

"Oh, no! The lord of the Sea was frightened and did not enter the arena at all! He said, 'What to talk of my greatness, my son! How can I combat with you? Fighting with one like me will not get you fame. There is a king of mountains called Himavanta. If you fight with such a fellow, it will satisfy your desire and you will get fame also. So, go there, my lad.' Thus the lord of the sea got rid of that menace."

"All right! What have I got to do with a coward like this? He is lamenting that he cannot fight", thought Dundubhi and went to Himavanta, leaving the lord of sea. Throwing away all the rocks on the mountain, he challenged Himavanta, with shouts, "Come on! Come to combat with me!"

"So Himavanta might have subdued his arrogance", said Rama and nodded his head.

"No, not at all. Listen further. Himavanta was frightened and cried, 'My lad, Dundubhi! I am not a war hero! Some enemies might have told you so...but...I don't know those blows or battles...Here, I live, worshipping these ascetics doing meditation. I offer them a nut or fruit and serve them. Of what use will it be to you if you trouble me?' Himavanta lamented."

Rama did not like Himavanta entreating the Rakshasa in that manner.

Sugriva is going on narrating. "Dundubhi got angry. 'Nonsense! The Lord of the sea said that you are so great that you *tear up anything*. Are both of you against each other? Fool that he was, a liar! If he did not know, he should say so! Why should he mention your name?' He got irritated. 'All right...Do you know of any great warrior? I have a strong passion to fight with an equal, tell me!' he pestered Himavanta.

Then Himavanta thought well over it, and do you know whose name he mentioned? My brother's name! - 'Why not? There is a *Vanara* king named Vali in Kishkindha. One of great strength. Adept in a duel. If you both combat it will be like two proud elephants combating. Gods too will descend to see you both fight. So, start immediately.', said Himavanta and saved himself. He might have thought for himself, 'Your arrogance will be wiped out.'

Dundubhi said arrogantly, 'Oh! Is Vali such a great warrior?...I shall see what he is up to. Perhaps, you too may be a liar like the lord of the sea.' He came at once to Kishkindha. He stood in front of the fort at midnight and challenged my brother to fight. He could not wait till my brother came there. He made a hell of turbulence by pounding the fort walls, doors and plucking trees. My brother told him calmly in the beginning so to say! To be frank, my brother is not the type to start a brawl..."

That is a moment for the buttock of Sugriva to fall into catastrophe. But Hanuman is in a hurry to burn leaves, making a fire for his cigars.

Sugriva went on with undiminished enthusiasm describing the qualities of his brother. "My brother so justly said, 'Sir, who are you? Why this enmity between you and me unnecessarily?' But did Dundubhi heed him? When it was destined so, how could he heed him? Moreover, he poked fun at my brother. - 'So you are unable to come alone leaving behind your womenfolk? All right! I'll wait till dawn. Say your farewell to kith and kin. Make all the arrangement for the transfer of kingdom to whomsoever you want', he shouted.

Let me tell you frankly. My brother *boiled with rage*. Should he not have boiled with rage in that situation? He went to fight with that fellow at once."

Sugriva plunged back into the period when he had no enmity with his brother and went on depicting the valour of his brother with pleasure.

On seeing him so glad, it appeared as though Sugriva might say at any moment, "What enmity is there between my brother and me?...All the while I prattled without sense. I cannot tolerate *even if a fly sits on* my brother. Go your own way", feared Rama.

Sugriva sprang up like a ball and imitating both sides, he described how Vali and Dundubhi fought. He dashed towards Rama…trampled the legs of ministers…demonstrated the entire battle vividly, graphically to Rama. In the course of that jumping, he powdered the leaves that Hanuman had burnt into dust.

In that battle scene a great quarrel must have taken place between Sugriva and Hanuman, but Hanuman looked at Sugriva with appreciation and plunged into the programmme of stuffing snuff into his nostrils.

"In that way Vali and Dundubhi *fought and fought and fought*….finally Vali triumphed. Dundubhi was killed. Vali kicked the dead body of Dundubhi like a ball. It flew the distance of a *yojana* and it fell on the mountains near the hermitage of sage Matanga. The hermitage was sprinkled with blood. Sage Matanga saw with his *inner eye* and angrily cursed, 'That villain of a fellow who polluted my hermitage surroundings will die the moment he comes here. This curse will be in effect from tomorrow". Some Vanaras of the forest went to Vali and informed him of the curse. Vali regretted very much and approached sage Matanga and prayed to him to be forgiven. Sage Matanga went inside the hermitage, not giving an ear to Vali. Vali returned helpless with regrets."

Sugriva's zeal abated and he sat at his usual place. "That is why, Vali will not come to these surroundings. If he comes here he will surely die!"

By then Sugriva again remembered his hostility with Vali. He remembered the mountain. He remembered the ministers. He looked around. The ministers are smoking cigars and visualizing each a heaven with half-closed eyes. Sugriva's heart is also tempted to seek that heaven. "Not now. Killing Vali and cremating him, I shall light a cigar in that funeral pyre", he swore.

"Rama, my brother is not an ordinary fellow. He is terribly cruel. A Rakshasa in the form of a human. I don't know when I will get rid of the evil. I don't know when he will fall…." As Sugriva was abusing his brother, it was pleasing to the ears of Rama… but… Lakshmana, who listened all those abuses… can't say, any moment…this defiance…younger brother abusing the elder brother…not that good.

After remembering the strength of his brother, Sugriva completely lost all faith in the *arrow sticks* of Rama. He felt totally depressed. "Rama! Since Vali cannot come here, I am able to talk to you unperturbed! Look there!...that side. At the trees of soap nuts. Do you see? That is the corpse of Dundubhi. When my brother kicked it only once in Kishkindha, it flew and fell here", he showed it.

A heap of a mountain of skeleton. Rama was wonderstruck on seeing it.

Lakshmana had a big doubt. "So you know well, how strong your brother is? Then, how could you have assumed that Mayavi had himself killed your brother?" He thought of commenting but kept silent on seeing Rama serious.

Rama saw at Lakshmana as if suggesting to him, "It seems he is not confident of my strength. Why don't you tell him."

Collecting himself and looking at Sugriva, Lakshmana said, "You told about the strength of your brother. All right! But it seems you don't have confidence in my brother!" Lakshmana smiled.

"No, No! Why don't I have confidence?"

"All right! Why all this beating about the bush? Tell us what action of my brother will instill confidence into you, to prove that my brother has more strength than Vali.

"No…o…No! Why any action?...As it is better to enter the arena confirming our strength…that's all! Dundhubhi's skeleton… over there… just flying it by a measure of two hundred bows height…enough. Then surely Vali is dead!...Rama! Not that I don't have confidence in you! No…In fact, you…."

Rama rose *serenely*. Lakshmana too rose up along with Rama.

Sugriva too rose.

Dragging him by his shoulder, Tarudu tried to wake Nila up. "Get up! Get up! How long will you *doze dirtily*? Rama is doing something. Let us see...You will again cry that I have not woken up." Not succeeding, Tarudu forcibly dragged Nila with a determination to wake him up any how.

Nila said in disgust, sleepily, "Ugh!...What? Tut…Get away."

Rama is doing something."

"Aye…"

"What Aye…? Don't you see?"

"No!...."

"Go to hell! What can I do?....." Leaving Nila, Tarudu ran that side.

Nila stretched his legs and hands as if feeling, "Oh! What a comfort?"

Hanuman hurriedly wound up all the cigar material…ran off trampling Nila's hands.

Except Nila, all gathered round Rama. Rama shut his eyes *serenely* and chanted some verses to himself.

Nala whispered in the ears of Tarudu, "There is nothing great in chanting verses. Vali had kicked the corpse without chanting mantras, hadn't he?"

Tarudu *felt an itching in the ears* and shook his ears saying, "Ugh! Be quiet! Lakshmana is observing us". He felt irritated.

Rama completed his chants, pushed his foot under Dundubhi's skeleton and kicked it up. That fell round the mountains, scattered everywhere.

Sugriva felt glad for some time…then slowly felt depressed.

Rama looked at Sugriva askew in the pride of triumph and turned pale. Then he looked towards Lakshmana *serenely*.

Lakshmana looked at Sugriva as if asking, "Will you concede the strength of my brother?"

Sugriva looked vacantly as if replying, "How can I concede it?" But he murmured, "A great deed indeed. But…"

"You say 'but'? What is your doubt, Sugriva?"

"Just between us. When my brother kicked Dundubhi, do you know how Dundubhi was? He was like a fat elephant…Now, no! *Wet in the sun and dried in the rain*…What remains there? Like dry bramble, kicking such a thing, what is great in it?" He said and is again disheartened.

Rama frowned *solemnly*.

Lakshmana looked Sugriva with a smile. "Sugriva! My brother demonstrated the same thing that you wanted, didn't he? All right! He can do any other action that pleases you. Don't doubt, ask for any demonstration!" he said consoling.

Rama frowned and looked around thinking 'What more will Sugriva ask her to kick. Is this tribal man capable of testing me? … Killing of Tataka!... Breaking Siva's bow!...With Parashurama…!"

"See, those *Maddi* trees. Do you?" said Sugriva pointing out the trees to Lakshmana.

Rama looked that side dropping his reference to Parasurama.

"My brother shook these trees many a time…He made them bare making them shed their leaves with his shaking. Any onlooker would reel at such a sight. *May his strength last long!*" said Sugriva and showed surprise afresh.

Nala got irritated and said again in the ear of Tarudu. "What sort of abuse is this?...He should say, *'let his strength fall'*….If his strength lasts long he will pulverize us."

Tarudu said calmly, "What you said is true…slip of the tongue in a hurry…will his strength last long by a mere wish?" He chuckled.

Nala got angry and began to argue in the ears of Tarudu. "So, that means, it won't fall if you say, 'let it fall!', it won't last long if you say 'let it last long!' Then why should there be abuses? It seems you don't have faith in abuses!"

Tarudu got irritated. "Keep quiet! My ears itch due to this vexation." He twirled the edges of his *dhoti*, the lower garment and put it in his ears.

Rama is aiming his arrow at Maddi trees. Rama has no hesitation in showing his valour with regard to arrows. Moreover, he is very enthusiastic. Rama put his arrow aiming and looked at Sugriva *serenely*. "Sugriva! You are not aware of the power of these weapons. Now, I shall exhibit a wonderful deed", so saying he pulled the bow string strongly and released the arrow.

The arrow dashed through the Maddi trees breaking them with a terrible sound that had never been heard in those mountains by trees and birds.

Birds sprang up loudly chirping. Animals in the bushes ran away perplexed.

Sugriva and his ministers stood stunned. Nila was frightened and looked around astounded.

"If such a powerful arrow hits Vali's chest, how terrible it will be?" Sugriva swooned, unable to contain his joy.

Puffing out his cheeks, Hanuman looked in wonder at the bow and arrows in turns.[268]

"What? What happened?" Nila asked Tarudu in confusion.

Unable to speak with wonder, Tarudu pointed to Rama with reverence and saluted him.

"Rama? What has he done?

Tarudu pointed to the Maddi trees at a distance and saluted him.

"Breaking them!...How did he hit the trees?"

Tarudu pointed to the arrows, stared at them and saluted again.

Nila grasped the whole thing. He looked at Tarudu indignantly. "Couldn't you wake me up?... I also would have witnessed?...Oh!...You people alone?..."

The *body* of Tarudu *burnt in anger* and he burst out, "Enough! keep quiet! I shall box your ears. However much I pull you, you don't wake up…but…put blame that we have not woken you up!"

"Did you wake me up?...Usually, I wake up even at the *noise of an ant* walking by!"

"Don't tell me about your sleep. You don't wake up even if big drums are beaten or elephants trample you"

"That alone angers me. My mother used to scold me in my childhood that I didn't sleep. She used to tell all people, 'Our Nila does not sleep at all! He always troubles me!'…"

"In childhood, you troubled your mother and now it seems you have fulfilled all that sleep here. The king also got very angry. Wait, he will thrash you black and blue."

Nila shrank a bit and looked askew at Sugriva to see if he 'really was angry'.

Prostrating at the feet of Rama, Sugriva is rambling something. "…You Rama! I could not grasp your greatness. You can cut Indra into pieces. Why talk about Vali? Though I was talking with you all the while, I have had no confidence that this task could be carried out, You know! Now all the suspicions I had have

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268. The entire *Vanara* race (monkey race) in *Ramayana* reflects the situation in which they lived like animals among animals in a stage when human beings had not yet invented any weapon. During that stage, human beings had no other weapon except physical strength. During that period human beings used to protect themselves with stones and branches of trees from animals and enemies. The first powerful weapon invented in human societies was the 'Bow'! It gave immense power to human beings over animals. The Bow got a 'holy' place in society.

Vali had no weapons except his physical might. He did not have even a sword. Rama had weapons. That was his strength. Physically Rama was not stronger than Vali. Sugriva did not concede to his strength being greater than Vali's. Because of the power of the weapon Rama was more powerful than Vali.

Kishkindha kanda, sarga 12, slokas 3 & 4: The arrow of Rama dashes through breaking great trees and felling the mountains that were at the back and goes into the ground and springs back at once and enters the quiver on the shoulder of Rama. Though this is a myth, we have to infer from this scene that the bow a very powerful weapon.

Though Rama had the sword also, it did not have the 'holy' status of the bow. So, if Vali performed certain heroic deeds, Rama exhibited greater heroic deeds with his weapons! ★

been dispelled", so saying he shed tears.

He cautioned himself within, "Now, the task will be accomplished by this man. So I should go on praising him once in a while to ensure it will happen!"

Rama with a smile, raising Sugriva said, "Sugriva! So, now you have *full confidence* in me, haven't you?...Don't hesitate. Ask freely…Any more deed…" He looked at Sugriva *askew*.

Sugriva, who rose half, fell again face down. "How dare!...How dare!...", he said.

Rama felt *fully satisfied* on seeing the awe and respect towards him on all the faces there.

"Sri Rama!...Then…When…that wicked fellow…?"

"Why 'when'? Now itself. The rope of the bow is still there. Start, let us go! You call your brother for combat! I shall hide myself in the spot where trees are thick in Kishkindha. You taunt your brother and bring him to the place where I stand. While you both fight, on that wicked fellow, I will shoot my…sharp arrows."

Sugriva swooned again overwhelmed with joy.

★ ★ ★

"O wicked fellow! Vali! Come on fight with me! See if you can fight with me", so shouting and *slapping his thighs* Sugriva began roaring that reverberated on all sides, standing in front of the fort in Kishkindha.

The moment he heard Sugriva's voice, Vali darted out of the fort with *burning wrath.*

"Come on, you vile fellow. Catch me", taunting and provoking Vali, Sugriva ran back and brought Vali to the intended spot.

Vali, with unbearable anger, pounced upon Sugriva. Vali's zeal crossed all bounds on seizing his enemy who has provoked him so much. Blows began to rain on the back of Sugriva. Sugriva is groaning in pain at every blow at the top of his voice. Vali was offering Sugriva not only blows, but also kicking, slapping, boxing, hitting in the groins, punching, beating on the head and dropping him down and many more things in various modified ways with enthusiasm.

Sugriva, who is like *a terror to* his *enemies*, is spending all his valour in crying at the highest pitch. For each blow, he is looking towards the trees.

Rama, who is ready with arrow and bow, is feeling terribly reeling. His ears are echoing with the sounds of the blows and cries of brothers. Every thing is in an utter confusion.

"Both of them are revolving round and round and are intertwined. I am unable to know who is who", Rama said to Lakshmana with worried looks.

"The fellow giving blows may be Vali and the fellow crying may be Sugriva", said Lakshmana.

Rama has not agreed, "The fellow crying also is punching."

"What punching? One for ten. One kick for ten. Is it called punching?"

Rama is hesitant to shoot the arrow. If it fails to hit, after I release it? If Vali turns back and jumps towards these trees…?

Rama is still engrossed in thoughts.

Sugriva… crying… ran towards Rishyamuka. Vali went on chasing him and stopped at a distance and howled, "Wicked fellow, you have survived!... Escaped!" and he returned.

Sugriva ran and ran into the mountains and fell down. He is fulminating in anger and emotion. All gathered round Sugriva. Hesitating and quivering Rama also joined them. As soon as he saw Rama, Sugriva felt like catching hold of his hair in a jump, bend his head and beat him up with blows vengefully. But he could not wield his hands and feet. He does not have strength even to move his little finger. He dropped himself down exhausted and shed tears with helpless anger. He looked at Rama angrily and said, "You have done very well, gentleman! Why have you deceived me so much? You said you are a truthful man. Said you would never lie. So this is your truthfulness! Is it not your plan to make that wicked fellow beat me to death. Had you told me in the beginning itself that you won't kill him, would I have climbed down from this mountain and gone to his area? You have helped very well. Thank god. I survived.

Glad that at least now your real nature has been revealed to me. You say, 'we have to find out where Sita is....Sita!" He began to rain abuses.[269]

Rama has never known such an insult since he was born. He thought *somebody has removed his head and is carrying it away.* 'A stupid fellow...a tribal man...in front of so many people...in front of Lakshmana...is railing at me like that'....Rama is stunned.... 'It is better to convince this fool quickly. Otherwise what more abuses he might rain on me'.

Rama cast off some of his *serenity*. He cast off some shame and ignominy also and placed them beside the *serenity*. He said in a trembling tone, "Calm down a little bit, Sugriva! A noble man like you...without considering the good and bad...is not fair to blame others. Believe me. I could not at all distinguish between you and Vali. Your jewels... dress... gait... features ... appearance...all are alike. It was difficult to distinguish who was Vali and who you were." Rama began to explain.

"Enough! Stop it. You said you would never lie. Dress, ornaments are all alike?...Didn't that fellow have a diamond necklace? The whole miracle is in it. In my fate, where is there such a thing round my neck?" Sugriva boiled with anger.[270]

Rama was surprised and thought for a while. He is not able to recollect having seen any necklace round the neck of Vali. When everything was confusing and he was about to observe a bit more carefully, this stupid fellow ran towards the mountain. Would it have been better, had he shot an arrow at Vali then? "Believe me Sugriva! That necklace might have been hidden among other ornaments. I did not recognize it at all. Had I released an arrow and if it had hit you? Had I not promised to protect you?...If I killed you knowingly or unknowingly, would that great sin not befall me? In your absence or in my absence, all our plans would go waste, wouldn't they? I have harboured many hopes on you. If you are not there, who will be my refuge? If a friend like you is not

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269. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 12, slokas 25 & 28:

"Sugriva bowing down his face in shame and seeing Rama coming to forest, said pathetically, "You showed me your valour, asked me to challenge Vali to battle and now made the enemy beat me. Having done all this, now what do you think about? Had you told me *then itself* that you would not kill Vali, I would not have gone to fight with him." - Why should Sugriva feel shame to say these words? Moreover, without anger, "bowing down his head, looking at the ground", said pathetically! What was the agreement between Rama and Sugriva? Killing Vali. That did not take place. Unaware of the real reason would Sugriva talk angrily or pathetically? The poet always takes the side of Rama. The poet moulds everything in favour of Rama. ★

270. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 12, slokas 30 to 32: Rama could not hit Vali in the first attempt. "Both of you are alike, so I could not recognize Vali", he said. Won't minor differences at least reveal in dress, ornaments, or gait? As such a question might crop up, the poet carefully inserted all things that indicate differences between two persons.

"As both of you resembled with one another in ornaments, attire, body size, gait, voice, complexion, looks, valour and words, I was beguiled", says Rama. (*If valour too was alike why should one gentleman run away toward the mountain?*)

Sarga 11, sloka 38: Whenever Vali goes to combat, he wears a necklace. While going to fight with Dundubhi, Vali wore a necklace which his father (Indra) had given to him. The same necklace was there when Vali and Sugriva fought. This is the difference between the two, isn't it?

Creating a special necklace for Vali, attributing a miracle to it, the poet makes Rama throw such a hero also down. When Rama says, "Your jewels and ornaments are all alike....", the poet kept silent as if he did not know about the special necklace. The poet's view is 'nobody would raise that question defying Rama's words!' ★

there, who will protect me?" said Rama and lowered his head.

Sugriva's heart began to soften even in that heat of anger.

"Sugriva! Get ready for battle again. This time shall I let it happen again *like that*? I'll tear Vali's chest open with one arrow. I'll tear it! Yes! Get up!"

"Again? For battle?" hissed Sugriva, with anger. "Already my left shoulder is disjointed. Is it because the right shoulder is intact that I should go to fight again? For battle?"

Lakshmana got so angry as to beat Sugriva to death. Why doesn't he heed? Does he think it is Sri Rama Chandra or some *Yellayya or Pullayya* (Tom, Dick and Harry) to ignore? These tribals are utter fools"

The entire anger gripped Lakshmana while *calmness chose Rama*.

"Grasp my idea Sugriva! This time…If you put on some symbol so that I can recognize you, it is a matter of few moments to kill Vali", so saying Rama looked around and said, "Lakshmana! See that fully blossomed *Gaja pushpa lata*, a big flower creeper, get that and put it as a garland in the neck of Sugriva." Rama saw *serenely*.

As his brother has ordered him, Lakshmana got that flower creeper but feared that Sugriva might spring at him in anger. So he stood at a distance from Sugriva.

Sugriva developed confidence in Rama's words but…the corner of the left shoulder pained and it groaned, "Don't believe him, don't believe him."

"No. Battle, again?...No use, some how… on this mountain as long as I live…", said he and sat stretching his legs.

As he found himself in a fix, Rama looked at Sugriva's ministers in turns and finally fixed his gaze on Hanuman with a requesting posture.

Recouping their spirits, all the ministers gathered round Sugriva. "Your Excellency! What *all* Sri Rama says appears to be just. He is your friend. He does good to you and not harm. Time has come that we may over come our troubles. You have to go to battle again. Forget all that has happened…," they appealed to him.

Sugriva frowned. "I would forget. But what about this left shoulder?"

He spoke in disgust harshly to the ministers, but he hoped that Vali might really die this time. If I set out with confidence? If that wicked fellow dies today, by evening royal physicians … can warmly treat this shoulder… fomentation … massages… throne… crown… kingdom of Kishkindha for ever…! He tried to rise, groaning. But his back failed him. It showed opposition to fighting. "Oh! No…No! It is inevitable for you to accompany me…", said Sugriva to his back and stretched it. Rama also extended a helping hand along with his ministers to Sugriva to get up.

"Oh, Mother!…The joint of the left shoulder…Hell with you!" hissed Sugriva. "Don't put your hand on the left shoulder…*Life is draining out*" Sugriva rose somehow.

Sugriva's feet are obstinate saying, "We won't come to the battle." When Sugriva tried to step forward his legs swayed to sideways and backwards. With legs and shoulders reluctant to come to battle, Sugriva walked unsteadily for some time and then straightened his back.

Lakshmana came near him with the flower creeper.

"Have you checked if there are insects in it? They may bite me to death", exploded Sugriva again.

Lakshmana ground his teeth in anger but said with smiling face, "There are no insects, my friend!"

"Check if any *touch me not leaves* are there. My work will end up in scratching myself instead of fighting", said he and put his neck forward. Lakshmana put the flower creeper round Sugriva's neck and tied the knots tightly.

Rama observed Sugriva from top to toe and said, "Ah! How handsome you are Sugriva! You are shining like Indra among gods. You shine like the Sun during the destruction period". He bestowed smiles on him.

"Spare this talk…this time at least… Really?"

"Trust my words, Sugriva! I never speak

lies. Believe me!"

"I'll believe you after the work is done. If you do as you did a while ago…Why should I tell you? You will see yourself? My brother will understand the whole story. Do you think he will let you live?"

Without looking at any one else, Rama observed the beauty of the tree tops.

Lakshmana got so angry as to pounce on Sugriva at every other moment. 'Stupid fellow! His audacity springs up out of ignorance. What does he know about Sri Ramachandra's fame and reputation?'

Sugriva is limping and groaning at every step. If any one touched his feet or hands, he cursed them, "You stupid fellow! The hell with you! Why do you *fall on* me *like bulls*?" And he walked at a distance of *two arms' length*.

Nila caught hold of the ear of Tarudu and said with irritation, "Is this a marriage party loitering around? Or is walking towards a battle?"

"Poor fellow, what can he do? That wicked fellow broke every joint of his!"

"Tell me, I don't understand…why didn't Rama shoot an arrow? Why does he say that he failed to recognize Vali? Do you think it is difficult for strangers to recognize these two? These two resemble one another!"

"I don't believe it! Can't he recognize that much?...Perhaps, looking at Vali, Rama was frightened and must have thought, 'how will my arrow affect such a great fellow'…"

"Tut! He felled very big trees with that."

"I don't believe it, you see! Do you think Rama pierced them?"

"That's why…did you wake up however much I tried…"

Look, that I don't accept. In fact, I wake up *even if an ant makes the slightest noise*. You don't know about me. In my childhood, my mother….."

"*Blessed be your mother*! Keep quiet! The king is already angry."

"You said he was very angry because I slept? Why has the king not asked me about it?"

"He will ask you. He will crack up some time."

By then Sugriva has descended the mountain slowly. He is allowing only Hanuman to help him a bit.

Rama was struggling for some time to cool Sugriva down by engaging him in conversation. "By the by Sugriva! I have heard that whatever you dream on Rishyamuka will come true. Have you dreamt of any thing?" He asked.

"Have I ever had a wink of sleep to have dreams?" Growled Sugriva.

Rama remained silent.

"Nila dozed off some time ago. He might have had some dreams", said Nala.

Sugriva remembered the crime of sleeping of Nila. Looking angrily at Nila, he asked, "By the by, you are a minister! What is this snoozing at will? Has my father-in-law told you that I was angry?"

Nila was perplexed. "Yes, your Excellency! Though I closed my eyes, I saw everything… Rama shooting an arrow and all that…Every thing I watched", he said humbly rubbing his own hands.

"Don't tell me all that! Admit your fault! If it were any other king, he would have ordered a death sentence by hanging, you know! Admit your fault!"

"Yes sir!...I have made a mistake by snoozing, your Excellency!"

"It is not enough to admit a mistake!...One should never repeat it."

"Yes sir! Never shall I repeat the mistake of sleeping!"

Nala whispered into the ear of Hanuman and asked hesitantly, "Will the king never allow us to sleep?"

"Not just any time, I think. Let us ask him later. Now he is angry."

"Well, how do I know? May be till Vali dies?"

"Ugh! Keep quiet! What more do we want if we already know it?"

Sugriva asked Nila, "All right, you may have slept…Have you had any dream?" He saw again angrily.

"Yes…It seems so…your Excellency!"

"What? You had…Then why don't you tell

me? Tell me quickly...what was the dream?"

"All of us were in a big forest..."

"We are already in it, aren't we?"

"Oh, no, not this! Still a bigger forest!"

"It's all my eye...still how big is that forest? Well, then what happened?"

"What happened?...what happened exactly...There was a big bang!...My dream vanished somewhere, king!"

"So this is what you accomplished by sleeping? If it were another king, he would have beheaded you for such a dream...Oh! Oh! This knee cap..."

"Walk slowly, Sugriva! Why hurry? We can go slowly observing the beauty of the surrounding places", said Rama soothing Sugriva. Rama walked cautiously by the side of Sugriva, taking care not to touch his shoulder.

A thick grove appeared at a distance. There are many Banana trees around the grove.

Seeing that grove of trees with surprise, Rama asked Sugriva with a smile, "Sugriva! The first time we went this way in a hurry...So, we did not see the beauty of it all! These groves...Oh!...they are shining like clouds in the sky. These birds twinkle like stars. Tell me about the story of these banana trees."

"What can be the background for these banana trees, my lord! *Like my grave*! Will there be a background for a plant to grow in the forest?...Oh, Mother! This left shoulder may not heal. I want neither kingdom *nor grave*! I have lost my arm...let it be, I will stay alive like this on this mountain!"

Lakshmana thought that Sugriva's anger may cool down if he soothe his left shoulder for a while; but he remained silent thinking that Sugriva might hiss with anger if he touched his shoulder.

As Sugriva recollected the history of the banana trees, his heart pounded in trepidation. He restrained his groans for a while and said, "Rama! A while ago I uttered some thing. It was a slip of the tongue because of this shoulder pain. This garden was the hermitage of great sages in the past. There used to be seven sages called *Saptajana*. They used to perform great penance...Oh! They always used to lie down with their heads in water. There were more, like that, I don't know...My grand father used to tell us many things..." He paused.

Nala took it up in great enthusiasm, "Yes, my grand father also used to tell. The seven sages used to inhale only once in seven days...."

"Thank god! It would have been better if one sage inhaled on behalf of all the seven!", said Nila ridiculing the story.

"What? Don't you believe it although my grand father told it?"

"I don't believe. How can any one live seven days breathing only once? It is all like the *face* of your grand father. Nonsensical lies."

"*I will fell your teeth*, if you say a word against my grand father. Breathing once, they lived not for seven days, but for seven hundred years, you know?"

"Seven hundred?" Sugriva fell in a doubt, "My grand father said, 'fourteen hundred years'?"

"Yes, sir! Let us believe the king's grand father. My grand father became senile...had a cough, forgetfulness and every thing else attacked him. Your grand father is correct, sir!"

"I don't believe it even if it is the grand father of the king. I challenge you to live for half a day without breathing", said Nila persistently.

"You fool. It is not the case of you...or me. They were great sages. Outstanding sages. Seven sages.", said Hanuman puffing out his cheeks.

Nila was taken aback. "Yes, Yes!", he *bit his tongue*. "Alas, I forgot that they were sages...Absent mindedness...I thought it was a matter of ordinary people. Oh!...it is Sages, yes! What a mistake I have made!" He plunged into remorse.

Nala was feeling too irritant. "They say what my grand father said was false, untrue! For that matter none in our family uttered a single lie, you know? My grand father...for that matter..."

Nila is unable to raise his voice.

Rama turned his face aside and frowned. 'Except the Raghu clan which family is there that has not uttered lies?...Bashful. Fools! The tribals!'

Sugriva resumed the narration. "So that is the thing! Such great sages…They lived here hundreds of years and went to heaven in their mortal coils. From then on trees grew and this hermitage turned into a forest. Even gods cannot enter this place, you know? But for those who do penance, there are enough fruits, roots, grass and the like available here. He turned towards the trees and said, "Oh, Mom! This left hand pains a lot". Somehow he put his hands together and saluted the trees.

Rama is thrilled on hearing that sages had lived in that grove. Bowing respectfully to the banana trees, he prayed, "O seven sages! Bless me to succeed without hindrance in my task."[271]

They moved towards Kishkindha from the garden of seven sages. Sugriva's gait became very slow, when they were nearing the town.

"Rama! This time, without fail…that arrow!"

"Believe me Sugriva! My arrow is sharper than Indra's diamond weapon…"

"Oh, it may be sharp! First you have to release it, then comes sharpness or power, doesn't it?"

"Why don't I release it? This time I can identify you, can't I?"

"That's why I am telling you. Shoot the arrow when Vali is at a distance. What do you say?"

"I will do so. You will see it yourself'

"I don't know what I will see. Vali will…you and me…"

"Sugriva! Why so much talk? If I don't kill Vali, then you can blame me as you please"[272]

"What? Again…" Sugriva turned pale. "Where will I be to blame you? You decide that now", said Sugriva and stopped walking and squatted there.

"No, no, no, no, Sugriva! Listen to me. I said it just casually", faltered Rama and tried to lift up Sugriva but Sugriva slipped out from Rama's hand. When he tried to lift him up again, he slipped out again.

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271. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 13: It was only while going the second time to kill Vali, Rama, Sugriva and his ministers come across the great gardens, lakes, trees and mountains. They went along the same path when they had gone to Kishkindha even the first time. Yet, the poet did not mention any thing then. "Any way they have to go again a second time; so let me depict it then" - this is how the poet may have remained silent. Let us suppose, the poet had described the hermitage of the seven sages during the first visit. Then Rama prays to the sages (that is, banana trees) doesn't he? If he does not succeed in his task, even after praying to the sages, it wouldn't be nice, would it be?...then the poet could write that Rama killed Vali in the first attempt. But the poet does not like to write that. Not because he wants Vali to give blows to Sugriva. But, the poet does not like to miss the joy of depicting the dramatic scene in which there arises confusion as to whom to kill between two persons who have a close resemblance while they are fighting. Except for this reason, there is no need for the poet to write that Rama could not kill Vali in the first instance. The poet was already declaring that Rama was the incarnation of Vishnu, that he did many great deeds and he gave salvation to some people. If such a Rama failed to distinguish between two men or animals - moreover while acknowledging that there was a necklace in Vali's neck and not in Sugriva's neck and yet he was unable to distinguish them - then it would be a matter of shame to both Rama as well as the poet who supported Rama. Of course, both of them had given up that sense of shame long ago! ★

272. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 14, sloka 12: When Sugriva was afraid of going to Kishkindha for a second time for combat, Rama said leisurely, "If Vali survives and returns, then you can make me feel guilty and blame me". There is no guarantee if he will kill Vali even the second time. If he cannot kill Vali the second time, Sugriva can 'blame' him. If this time too, it happens so, that will be the end of not only Sugriva but also of Rama. ★

"Sugriva! I swear again. Trust me. I never speak Un...truth! A great catastrophe may befall me, but I never utter any falsehood as it would violate justice. Get up! Challenge your enemy to fight heroically. This entire Kishkindha is yours. You will be on the throne in a moment. Priests will decorate your head with a resplendent crown. Many fair damsels...around you...in your service..."

Fresh energy entered the feet and hands of Sugriva. He rose up at once smiling.

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"O wicked fellow! Vali! Come to fight with me. Come this time and see what happens. Come on! Come out!"

"So you have come again?", Vali rose at once. Womenfolk in the harem were surprised on hearing Sugriva's war cries.

"Come to battle! May be bragging with women that you have done a great deed just once? Come out this time. I shall see your end."

Vali clenched his fist. His eyes became red like fire. As he could not wait even for a moment, he started and said, "You coward! Is playing with you also a battle?"

Tara is agitated and embraced her husband. "Warrior! Wait a moment! Don't be hurry. If the fellow, who received death blows earlier from you and fled is challenging for combat, there must be some reason behind it, think of it. I have my own serious doubts. There must be strong reason for arrogance of Sugriva. Listen to those roars like a lion. How confident is he of his victory! Sugriva must have brought some great hero to help him"

"Great hero? Who is that great hero?" Vali seemed insulted. "What do I care for whomsoever he has brought? Do you doubt my valour? Shirking for fear of the hero...will I concede defeat like a coward? Leave me! Let me go quickly...."

"Why don't you come Vali? Don't you have pride? With this blow, I will decide who will have Kishkindha! Wicked fellow, fight with me this time and secure the throne."

"Yes, I will secure it. I will decide who will have Kishkindha now. Wait I am coming. I will suppress your arrogance and send you to the mansion of *Yama* (the god of death)", said Vali and pushed aside Tara infuriated.

Tara, with tears and not letting go off the hands of Vali said trembling. "Excuse me! Don't be angry with me. Don't go now. Angada has heard from his spies and told me everything. Sugriva's lion like roars are not vainglorious. Behind him there is the Kosala king called Sri Rama as his supporter. It is said, he is a great hero and carries weapons. He is a man of justice...A man of great fame..."

Vali laughed carelessly. "You say he is a hero and a man of justice. Will a hero fight with some one with whom he has no enmity? Will a man of justice harm a fault less person? Tara! All this is your illusion. Let me go!" said he and released his hands.

"My Lord! Listen to my words *completely*. It is said Rama and Sugriva have made friends in front of the fire to help each other. Rama decided that justice is on Sugriva's side and he has sworn to help him."

Vali became furious. "If that is true Rama is also my enemy. Even then I must go to battle."

"But...it is not wise to go to battle alone in haste without knowing the strength of Rama. Don't neglect my word because I am a woman. Enmity with your brother is never safe for you. It will give you lot of strength to you to be in amity with him. Call him immediately and crown him as a prince. Then you will have no hostility with Rama. Forget your hatred for your brother. You have to pardon your brother. Treat him with affection and love."

Vali looked at Tara with surprise. "Haven't I loved Sugriva? Have I banished him from the kingdom unjustly?"

"Forget all that has happened. Although he has done many mistakes he is younger than you. After all he is your brother. It is wise to please your brother and make him loyal and a friend. If you believe that I am your well wisher, please heed my appeal. There is no other way for your safety. Don't have enmity with the Kosala king who has weapons."

"Why don't you come, coward? Will you leave the throne with out fight? Admit that you have lost the battle. I will not do any thing to you. Make it clear quickly."

"Do you hear that prattle? Being afraid of Rama, should I make friends with this base fellow? I will never do it. Do you want me to tolerate it when my enemy, standing in front of my castle, challenging me by slapping his thighs and uttering heroic words in a high pitch?...Is that coward's war excitement unknown to me? Is it not more terrible than death if I - who have never bowed before any one - keep quiet tolerating this humiliation?...Tara! You have expressed your view out of your abundant love and affection for me. But, I cannot follow your advice. I shall not tolerate Sugriva's wickedness anymore. Don't fear that Rama will harm me. He will not do anything to me…Don't come after me…Go! I shall come back in a short while, suppressing Sugriva's war madness. I shall not kill him. I shall leave him with a mere felicitation of blows, all right? Do not grieve…" he said and looked affectionately with a somewhat smiling face at Tara, in a hurry to go out.

Trembling with fear, Tara embraced her husband. "My dear! I can not bear your defeat. I pray to god that you should return victorious. I shall wait for the auspicious moments to meet you again. Farewell!" She said and let him go after removing her hands.

Vali dashed out *like an aimed and released arrow.*[273]

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Again, both of them attacked each other.

They were shouting.
Vali - with wrath.
Sugriva - with pain.

"Brother, are you not content with your earlier blows?", said Vali and rained blows on Sugriva's back. Blood spouted like a water fall from the navel of Sugriva. His eyes reeled and reeled and touched the stars above. Nowhere was in sight the arrow of Rama.

"Oh, you have come decorated with flower creepers! Why do you stare like that in all directions, brother?...Take these *cakes*. Eat well! As many as your back can bear. You have prattled as you pleased, haven't you brother?...Now, fight!" said Vali and threw away the flowers of garlands tearing them off from Sugriva's neck.

Birds and animals in the vicinity are running away in terrible fear hearing the cries of Sugriva for help.

Sugriva lost faith completely in Rama's arrow. It seemed impossible to escape from the hands of Vali. There seemed no way to survive if he did not retaliate. Terrible anger welled up at Rama. He began to struggle to win by hitting, blowing, biting and shouting. The valour of Sugriva shocked even Vali. Sugriva poured out all strength that he had gathered under compulsion, broke the joint of his right shoulder and made a death cry resoundingly.

While Sugriva was shrinking out of fear for his life, an arrow from behind the trees came speedily, tearing the air making a terrible sound and stuck in the chest of Vali. Vali was shocked as though a mountain coming in flight had jumped on his chest and fell to the ground.

Sugriva swooned in joy.

Within a bat of the eye, the entire city of Kishkindha appeared there. Hissing anger welled up among the people of Kishkindha to kill Rama. Without giving that chance, Sugriva's forces jumped with joy of victory.

In the midst of strength and weakness, 'valour' slept for rest. Vali - as though he would spring up any moment - looked around powerfully, full of life, and sternly for that vile fellow! For Sri Rama!

Sugriva rose from his swoon and seeing Vali wallowing in a pool of blood swooned again out of joy.

Rama came out heroically from behind the trees. With a strong belief that Vali might have closed his eyes, Rama walked up to Vali and became the prisoner of Vali's eyes, which were *burning like fire*.

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[273] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 16, slokas 5, 7 & 8:** Vali says to Tara, "Don't grieve that Rama will do anything to me. Because, will Rama commit the sin of killing an innocent one?...I shall not kill Sugriva in battle. I shall suppress his arrogance. I shall send him felicitating him with blows", Vali abided by the rules of a just fight. His view was that none will fight unjust battles. ★

With wrath that incited his soul and body, Vali looked at Rama sternly. "So you are Sri Rama? Embodiment of truth? World renowned? So you received the honour of hitting me from hiding while I was in fighting with another! You are a man of justice, they say!...Man of enlightenment!...Is all your fame so earned? A king shows his valour directly, will he ever show cowardice? Will he punish an innocent person, sparing the culprit? There is so much hypocrisy in your heart, then why this outward disguise of a sage?

I had come to know about you before. Yet I came to battle with the confidence that you wouldn't resort to such a base deed since you belong to a high caste and you are well educated. Now I know what the greatness of your caste is, what your knowledge of justice is and what your real nature is. I remained deaf to all the words which my first wife had said so sensibly and I faced humiliation at the hands of a base fellow like you..."

While Vali was throwing each question in the presence of all the people, Rama's head was *sinking into the ground*. Rama in fact had not expected such a situation of facing Vali. He thought that Vali would die the moment his arrow hit him...but...it had happened like this!

"While we live our lives in these forests, what is the need for you to come from far off Kosala country and kill me? Did I ever do an iota of harm to you or your kith and kin? You wicked fellow! What answer will you give to the world, killing a person like me who has not committed any crime?

Rama gathered courage, reddened his eyes and looked at Vali harshly. "Fool! You are not at all innocent. You are a culprit. You are blaming me without understanding the nature of *Dharma, artha and kama* and the worldly cultured custom. A person who knows justice ought to treat his brothers and followers as his own children...What have you done? You have Violated justice, you are enjoying pleasures with your younger brother's wife! Aren't these your faults?...That is why I have made you a victim of my sharp arrows. Do you understand?"

Vali became furious. "Who gave you the authority to punish me, judging my deeds?"

Rama looked *serenely* with a smile. "*Vanara*! (Ape!) The entire land belongs to the *Ikshvakus*. These mountains, valleys, forests, rivers, oceans and all regions belong to them. It is their absolute power that blesses or curses all the creatures, birds, animals and human beings. Bharata of that clan is now ruling the entire land. He punishes every one who transgresses 'Dharma'. At the command of Bharata some other kings and I go round the earth to establish 'Dharma'. It is our duty to punish every one who is opposed to Dharma, may it be birds, animals or human beings. I was born in a great *Kshatriya* family. I will not allow any unjust deed to happen any where on this earth. Scriptures ordain it that any one incestuous with daughter, sister or brother's wife should be killed. All those who knew *Dharma* have agreed with the *Manu Dharma Sastra,* Code of Manu, which defined what is just and what is unjust. I have done as stipulated in that scripture. I too should abide by the *Sastra*. I am not above the Sastras. There is no other way except punishing you with death because you have defied the customs of the world."

Vali's heart is becoming heavy with emotion. Darkness is enveloping his eyes.

Rama's words are causing agitation to Sugriva also. He came to make friends, requested to help him but now why does he say, "I am the king. The entire control is mine'. Today it is Vali who has become the victim. Tomorrow I may become the victim. Will it be the same case with any one? Will he say, 'you have to behave as I wish! Otherwise, it will be my duty to slay you'. What is this fate? It seems, I *removed the thorn and pierced a spike*." Sugriva bewildered.\

Vali looked at Rama sternly. "If you are the overlord of the entire world and if you have all the rights to punish offenders, why did you hide behind the trees like a coward? You could have come forward heroically and declared in front of all, 'See, you have committed many crimes. I punish you like this' and punished me. Is your authority sham authority, that imposes false punishment without letting the accused know about it? You have resorted to this crooked strategy since I do not surrender to your false authority. You are parroting the words 'Dharma', 'Dharma'...who can be meaner than you in violating Dharma? Who can be a worse offender than you? Had you fought with me face to face, it would have become clear who would fall to the ground by now. Don't swagger as if it is a matter of great repute to attack deceitfully."

With unperturbed serenity and slighting Vali's words, Rama flashed a smile once more. "Stupid fellow! You are a tribal man. You are like an animal. There is no difference between an animal and a human being who is like an animal. Humans can kill animals from hiding or in any such way. There is nothing wrong in it. I need not feel ashamed at killing from hiding a beast-like fellow and an offender like you who enjoys pleasures with the wife of his younger brother.

Infuriated and wrathful, Vali look at Rama with disgust. "I thought you were only a coward. So, you are senseless also? If I am a beast, Where is the fault? Where is the question of animals observing kinship relationships? Do they have codes? Among animals a mother has sexual relation with even her own offspring. An offspring enjoys pleasures with its mother. Are you dictating what is right and what is wrong to even birds and animals in nature as well? Are you observing birds, insects and animals, whether they follow kinship codes and kill those who break those codes? Have your scholars written codes for trees, birds and animals also? If you attempt to kill animals that do not follow the kinship codes, you will have to annihilate all the creatures in the world. Wicked fellow! Why do you offer these lame excuses?

You recite the code of principles that I have had a sexual relationship with my brother's wife. You are attributing a grave fault that I have not treated my younger brother as my own son. Has my younger brother treated me as his father? Because of whose fault did our enmity begin? Imprisoning me in a cave, my brother first had contact with my wife Tara. Later, I drove him away and developed contact with his wife. Now tell me whom do you find fault with?[274]

Rama frowned.

Sugriva moved behind Hanuman. "It seems Rama is looking angry. Do you think he will kill me?" He whispered. "Don't know. He said he would protect justice. He may kill me. Some thing or the other will happen. Be b... r... a... v... e!"

"Listen! Vali is saying something"

"Foreigner! Have you understood the crux of the matter? Our women are not such loyal wives who remain with one husband. It is the custom of our tribe. It is not my fault to live with Sugriva's wife after driving him away from the kingdom. You are making a futile attempt to impose on us the customs and morals brought from your distant lands. Without understanding the nature of codes of others you are carrying on your shameless rule of the world. In order to conceal your wickedness, you are blaming me as a fool and animal. You are feeling arrogant that the world cannot understand who a fool is and who an animal is..."

Vali's defiance is scattering the sternness of Rama every moment. A king like me! Lord of Kosala! Should I tolerate the questions and ridicules of a tribal? What a fellow - who has fallen like a tree cut off at the base - can gain in arguing? He will prattle on *till his life joins the five elements of nature*. Let him prattle!

"You ignoramus! A blind man cannot show the path to another blind fellow. What do you

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274. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 46, slokas 8 & 9:

Sugriva tells Rama on one occasion after becoming king. " ....Placing a boulder at the entrance of the cave, giving up hope that Vali was alive and coming to Kishkindha, I obtained a great monkey kingdom along with Tara and Ruma." From this we understand that Sugriva was with Tara, prior to Vali having contact with his brother's wife.

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know about justice and injustice since you were born among stupid monkeys? *Dharma* does not appear so easily to sensory organs. There is no use in arguing about it. It is kings who bestow welfare on the entire world. Kings are endowed with the quality of the *lords of the eight directions* and are the incarnation of gods. Except obeying the commands of kings, people should not find fault and blame them. They should not hate and defy kings.

"Then I too am a king, aren't I? I am also the ruler of the Kishkindha kingdom aren't I? Why have you found fault with my actions? Why have you hated and punished me? Is there one kind of principle of justice for your kingship and another principle for my kingship."

"Though you are a king...I am your overlord! I have the authority of justice to punish even you!"

"Enough, stop your shameless talk! Every body has seen your justice and virtue. It is not the code that bestowed on you all powers, it is your violence. You are exercising your domination over the world. A king like you, who voices principles of justice and morals only in words, rules people with injustice and cruelty. You are *like a ground-level well covered with flower creepers*! People will not be happy with a king like you just as virtuous women cannot be happy with wicked husbands. Being arrogant because of a weapon, you wander about without fear of sin or the world. You resorted to this vile act, thinking that you can get your job done through Sugriva by killing me. I would have gracefully given that help had you asked me; but you have revealed your ignorance."

"What need is there for me to depend on your grace? Sugriva is to me, just as my brother is. If he helps me or I help him that is out of our friendship."

"You said all Vanaras are beasts. Then how did one animal become your younger brother? Or have you yourself become an animal and then a brother of Sugriva?...O liar! Don't think that I am not unaware of the sacredness of your duty bound friendship. Your friendship did not spring up at a time when there was no need on either side. You came to an agreement since both of you have needs and want to fulfil them. For that, witness of fire! That is your bond of friendship! For your need you have made an animal not only your friend but also a younger brother. Is it not so? Or do you still bluff?...Vali will depart today. Tomorrow Rama will also depart. But the world will laugh at Rama hearing the reasons that Rama gave for killing Vali! Your fame will remain for ages!"

"I know that a discussion of justice with an ignoramus like you will go on like this. You have not learned the nature of principles of justice from our teachers who were good, wise and knowledgeable. I promised Sugriva to help him. He requested me to kill you. I am not an untruthful person who violates the promise I make. Sugriva is virtuous. There is no fault of mine in killing you for your sake."

Vali's eyes are closing with abhorrence and pain.

Hanuman instilled confidence into the ear of Sugriva. "Rama will not kill you. He has confirmed that you have not done any thing wrong."

He may not kill me...but how is it he said that I asked him to kill Vali? All the while he has been saying that he has himself killed for the sake of Dharma, hasn't he?...Better if he says so but if he says that I asked him...Will it be proper in the view of people from tomorrow?"

"Yes, this gentleman seems to be somewhat brainless", Hanuman felt irritated.

Nala and Nila sat on either side of Tarudu, kept on talking and *pierced his ears making it a sieve*. "Ugh! Both of you don't talk at the same time. I am not able to hear with either ear" Tarudu was irritated for some time.

"Vali has questioned Rama quite well"

"Not simply questioned, but thrashed him too"

"Anyway, Vali is Vali. Wise fellow. How can we get his wisdom?"

"Inside my heart...I feel somewhat sad...that we have done all this unnecessarily"

"Yes, I too feel the same way" said Tarudu, also feeling sad.

Rama resumed preaching sermons to Vali solemnly. "...No use of your wailing that death has come near you. Once a dunce like you too committed a sin like you. Emperor Mandhata, our ancestor, awarded him a terrible punishment. However bad the sinners, they become pious and go to heaven after receiving punishment from a king. If the king does not punish the criminals that sin will envelop the king. Some kings don't bring to trial some criminals in time, ignoring them. Later, they pronounce the death sentence suddenly. Of course, that is also good. Scriptures accept it. The criminal should not feel sorry that he receives a death sentence. His entire sin will be washed away due to that punishment. There is no harm to you facing death from the blow of my arrow. Atonement is made for your sin. Now you can go to heaven. I shall grant you redemption. Don't worry about your soul…"

Vali swooned out of *heart* pain and emotion.[275]

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275. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 17, slokas 13 to 52; Also, sarga 18. All the 68 slokas: In these two sargas we can see the conversation between Vali and Rama. To understand Rama's character, 'killing of Vali' is one of the episodes that we have to chiefly discuss. We have to look at it in detail. The manner in which the poet describes is that even those who suffered due to Rama praise Rama. It is so at every place!

Vali falling to the ground felt glad, "Oh! How well Rama shot his arrow!", the poet says. "Lauding Rama, the hero of the battle, that he shot the arrow well, Vali looked with great effort to see where Rama was."

When Rama came near him, Vali "uttered stern words in humility". Though 'stern', he uttered them 'in humility'!

Vali abused Rama a lot, but in humility! This is how he abused: "Till now, I was not aware that you call your self a virtuous man but in reality you are an unjust man and a sinner. You are a man who commits base deeds. You don't show it but do harm. You are of a bad temper. You don't have any courtesy. You simply carry a bow. Being lustful, you behave as your senses *drag* you" - Thus he abused Rama a lot. But all those abuses are not out of anger but in humility, says the poet! Amidst so many abuses Vali asked only two questions. "Why did you hit me? Why did you hit me deceptively?' Rama who was defied by Vali spoke noble words filled with Dharma and Artha, this is how Rama responded to Vali.

Those words are: "….Because of the inconsistency of your apishness (*Vanara mentality*) you blamed me. (*Sugriva and Hanuman also are Vanaras. Yet they do not have 'apishness'. They are virtuous! Moreover, they study all scriptures…grammars! But Vanarahood for Vali!*) "This land filled with mountains and forests belongs to the Ikshvaku kings. It is their duty to control or show mercy to animals, birds and humans. At the command of the virtuous Bharata, some other kings and I roam about the entire land seeking the development of Dharma". Will there be a blatant lie worse than this? While Bharata sits under the 'shoes' of this gentleman, why does he say that Bharata commands him? Who are these 'some other kings'? Whom are they killing? Rama who says that he is in exile as per the command of his father twisted the story and says, 'I am roaming the land for development of Dharma'. Thus, Rama is an *imperialist* who occupies the whole world! The essence of this story is occupation of other kingdoms!

"Scriptures ordain that those who commit incest with their own daughter, sister or wife of the brother should be punished. (*This means, before the scriptures were written, there was the practice of sexual relations with daughters, sisters and brothers' wives. Scriptures forbade it after some time. This means that some were still practising the old social customs.*)

"You are enjoying sex with your brother's wife. If sinners obey the punishment of kings, they become pious, says the code of Manu. We are ready to punish those like you who give →

→ up the customs in the world". (*In regard to punishing people unjustly in the name of justice, the present situation is akin to Rama's period - We have Rama's successors instead of Rama; guns instead of Rama's arrows. There is no difference.*)

"My friendship with Sugriva is like my friendship with Lakshmana. For the sake of Sugriva, who knows the nature of Dharma, I avowed that I would kill you…I am not of the sort to go back on an oath."

What shameless arguments! What justification is there in swearing like that? He says he won't violate his oath. In the past, when Sita asked him once, "You don't have any hostility with Rakshasas, do you?...then why talk of killing Rakshasas?', Rama said, "I have avowed to the sages. I am not the one who violates the promise. Shut up your mouth!" The devotees of Sri Rama alone should know whether there is justice or violence in these vows.

"You are blaming me for I hit you secretly. Humans kill animals in many deceitful ways. There is no sin in it. Since you are a *Vanara* (ape), I hit you secretly."

(*Valmiki wrote about Vali as an 'animal' only. But it is not possible to argue that Rama killed Vali because he was an animal and he would not have killed Vali if he were human being'. Whether they are birds, animals, or humans, it is the same for Sri Rama's rule of justice. Any way, Rama says that the Raghu dynasty has all the rights over humans as well, doesn't he?*)

"Kings are the incarnation of gods. None should trouble them, blame them, nor defy their orders. You are stupid since you are associated with Vanaras who are fickle minded and without knowledge of the soul. (*Treating another race with ridicule! Arrogance that his own race is superior!*) Your sin is gone by my punishment. You understand that it is Dharma that has punished you" - In this manner, Rama answered Vali. From this, one can understand how autocratic a king is and how kings' rule would be.

Even after Rama said, 'Since you are an animal, I killed you secretly', Vali did not question him, 'what kinship code do the animals have? Or, 'Sugriva is also an animal, how could he become your brother?' For that matter, in the actual story (*in what Valmiki wrote*), why Vali, who hurled so many abuses on Rama, did not ask such important questions? The poet did not make Vali ask those questions. If he had, then there would have been no answers to those questions. Hence, he made Rama give a bullying lecture and silenced Vali. Just because the poet sided Rama and shut up Vali's mouth, it does not mean that Rama succeeded in the discussion of Dharma (justice). 'Argument' means, it should continue till the other person has no question to ask. Even if Vali did not ask, "Do the animals have kinship codes?...What is it that an animal commits a fault?", what answer does Rama have if some other person had asked him later? What 'justice' is there in killing for the simple reason that an animal does not observe the code of kinship? Though Rama's actions and words are so crooked, see what Vali says finally (*or what the poet makes Vali utter*), that too with salutation!

"Vali with folded hands said this. "Supreme Being! What you have said is good. (*Beating* me *to death* is nice). There is no doubt about it. (*If the poet does not make Vali say so, it won't look nice!*) You are very wise. You do good for people. You know the appropriateness of the punishment for a given sin. I am vile. A sinner. (*The poet thought that there would be no conflict if Vali conceded like this*). Though Tara had warned me, I have come to battle to die at your hands". (*Then why did he abuse Rama in the beginning? Expecting such a question, the poet makes him answer. See what kind of answer it is!*) "Hit by the arrow, I swooned and abused you in the beginning. That was not right". (*So, now it is right!*)

See how Vali concedes the imperial hegemony of Rama! "If Sugriva secures your favour, be under your control and follows your wishes, he could rule the kingdom" (*If Rama makes* →

On hearing what had happened on the battle field Tara grief stricken, started to go to see her husband. When she came out of the harem, some warriors who were waiting for her, surrounded her and showed respect. "Queen! Terrible thing has happened! But we will wreak vengeance. Make Angada the king at once! All of us will serve Angada as king. We will not give the authority to Sugriva. Very soon the entire force of Sugriva will reach Kishkindha from all the places. We shall see that the enemy has no place in the kingdom…Allow us to do so your highness, queen", said they and *rained emotion.*

For Tara it was all utter darkness. All her attempts appeared futile. She was in despair of indecisiveness. "Heroes! I know all of you are loyal. When our king, who is a great hero and affectionate to all of us, is gone why this ambition for kingdom?…Why wreak vengeance?", said she and plunged into despair.[276]

Tara looked at her husband - who had fallen disorderly on the ground *like a tree rooted out by cyclone and like the king of elephants tied by blades of grass* - with great shock and disbelief. She embraced him with an uncontrollable emotion. "Great Hero! Have you, who never knew defeat, slept permanently? Have you - who made the heart of enemies tremble with the demonstration of the strength of your shoulders - fallen to the ground like a wounded lion? With so many enemies around you, you never slept so calmly? What has happened to your unequalled valour and terror for enemies? Deceived in the unjust battle and becoming helpless, are you *wallowing in mud and dust*? My dear! Forgetting your wives who weep for you, do you embrace the goddess of earth with love? Even in this defeat, there is no trace of sadness on your face. My mind is very hopeful that you will rise smiling any moment.

King! See all the citizens gathered round you and look at you pathetically. Get up and rest on a soft bed. You did not grasp that *Yama,*

→ *Vali accept that Sugriva must be under his control, it will add more strength to Rama, won't it?)*

After being hit by Rama's arrow, if Vali did not say anything and laud Rama, "You have done a good thing", it would not have looked nice. So the poet made Vali abuse Rama for a while in the beginning. He made Vali ask only two questions. The poet made Rama give stupid answers to those questions, show heaven to Vali and please him.

Finally Vali prayed to Rama, "Sri Rama! Pardon me for abusing you. Tell me that you have excused me, as I have done sinful acts." He conceded, "It is my fortune to be hit by your arrow!" When we read this scene, will we be convinced that the poet wrote this in a 'fair' manner? Readers must think for themselves about this.

In this story ***Accomplices***, Vali deplored Rama's words and not accepted any thing. Since Rama had a weapon in his hand, his violence triumphed. ★

276. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 19, slokas 14 & 17:

As soon as Rama killed Vali, will the people who stand on the side of Vali keep quiet without making any attempts? Will they accept Sugriva's authority? Because such questions arise, the poet also has showed such things. He is writing that some heroes got angry on Sugriva. Some warriors said to Tara, "The main gate of the city should be protected, Angada should be crowned, and the Vanaras will serve Angada who will rule in place of Vali".

But, those who said like that are not noble, the poet says. They are mean! "Tara heard the words of those who got a chance to talk and who were mean!"

If those warriors had joined the side of Sugriva, if they tell Tara to crown Sugriva, they would have become noble and wise! ★

the lord of death had come in the form of Rama, to plunge all your retinue in the *sea of sorrow*?

My husband! I am unfortunate in not being able to save you, in spite of knowing the imminent danger. With you has gone my prosperity. How is it that my heart does not break, even after seeing you in this plight? To whom will you hand over your darling son? Open your eyes at least once and embrace Angada. Kiss his head, console him and teach him what is good and what is bad and then depart! You - who fought justly - can establish another Kishkindha in heaven also."

"My lad, Angada! Your father is noble! A man of justice! He is going to those very distant lands from where he will never return. You will not get the sight of your father again. Look at him to your heart's satisfaction. Salute the feet of your father.

My dear! I also salute you. If I have done any thing unpleasant to you, please pardon me! You are my friend, lover, husband and everything to me! Because of your absence, I am carried away by the current of sorrow…"

Rama looked at Sugriva *serenely*. Sugriva looked at Hanuman.

Hanuman approached Tara with hesitation. "Don't grieve, *mother*! Who is responsible for one's fate?...Every thing happened in accordance with the deeds of this great man. But then, what is eternal in this world? These bodies will break like water bubbles. Riches and wealth *evaporate like camphor*. All of us will have to reach that state. What is the use of grieving for these bodies? [277]

You know what is good and what is bad. What is there that others can tell you? It is no use to lament over what has happened! Think of the future! You need not worry about your son. Even if his father has gone, will there be any thing that he lacks? Anyway it is he who will become crown prince, won't he? If you see your son on the throne tomorrow, you will forget all your sorrow that you have lost your husband."

Tara raised her head angrily. She was not unaware of the hypocracry of Hanuman who had joined the side of Sugriva. 'Shall I feel it enough if my son becomes prince?...If my husband were there, he was king himself!...Then anyway my son would be the prince? This fool is trying to beguile me by saying that I will heap treasures that were never known!'

"Hanuman! Do you think that I am so wicked as to forget the loss of my husband, after seeing the position of my son? Whether it is hundred sons or hundred princely positions, none will equal my husband's affectionate embrace!" Tara said and looked at him despicably and *shed a flood of tears*.

Vali, suffering the pain of death, came to his senses from fainting and opened his eyes.

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[277] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 21, slokas 1 to 10:** Hanuman consoles Tara, reciting *Vedanta philosophy*. "These bodies are unstable like water bubbles". (*Yes, ministerial positions alone are stable and eternal!*) One has to wail for one's soul and there is no use in wailing for others. (*Yes, one has to be anxious about his own 'position' and there is no use in thinking about others.*) Because he had assimilated the essence of Vedanta well, Hanuman left Vali and took the refuge of Sugriva for the sake of a ministership.

"Who is responsible for the fate of others, mother?"

These expressions turn the actual thing upside down. Hanuman knows that it was unjust to get Vali killed. Yet he speaks Vedanta philosophy. Vedanta transforms any and every unjust thing into 'fate'. One has to think that with regards to Vali, "It is his fate." Sugriva does not think his exile as his fate. Rama does not think that the separation from his wife is his fate. Vedanta always silences those who lose and sides those who gain. It creates 'spiritual wealth' favourable only to a few. We may note this on many occasions.

★

He realized that death would swallow him in the twinkle of an eye. Seeing Sugriva, he said, "Brother! I would not have grieved, had you killed me and taken away the kingdom. You have that right. Rama does not have the right. You fulfil the promise you made to Rama, soon. Otherwise he will kill you too. Do not get into such a danger. I commit Angada to your care. Treat him like your own son. Tara is intelligent. She is capable of conducting her affairs in accordance with the situation. Follow her guidance. It will be good for you."

Sugriva stood there with bowed head.

Vali looked affectionately at his son, who was weeping by his side. "My lad! I have no strength to embrace you!...Never try to defy your *younger father*! He secured a strong support. Try to understand the conditions of place and time and behave accordingly." Then turning his eyes towards Tara who sat beside him like *a goddess of sorrow*. "Tara! My dear! I did not heed your advice wishing my welfare. I fell a victim out of my ignorance. Death is inevitable for every creature that is born....But...so foolishly...to this kind of death...me yielding...pains me a lot...." So saying he gave up his mortal coil.

Nila came forward and removed the arrow from Vali's chest.

Convulsing with sorrow, Tara said to Sugriva, "Sugriva! Your enemy has departed. Now rule this land for yourself! Rule happily!" Only then she saw Rama. "King! Heap piety by killing me with the same arrow that you killed my husband with. Even if my husband goes to heaven, he will grieve for me. Why should you be burdened with the sin of separating a wife and husband? If you show grace, you can unite us in a moment. Send me to my loving husband", she wailed.

Rama, who was worried that Tara would abuse him, gathered courage after hearing her sad appeals. He looked at her *serenely*. "You look wise! Don't you realize that bewailing is foolish? Pain is as natural as pleasure in this world, they say. Realise that all this happened as per fate and keep cool! None is free to do anything. None has authority to command others. Everybody has to follow *Dharma*! Give up sadness that you cannot live without your husband. Your husband is a hero. You are the wife of a hero. Wives of heroes do not wail. By my grace your husband will go to heaven. Your son will become a prince. There is no need for you to grieve."

Rama - who thinks that only kingdoms and luxuries satisfy others just as they satisfy him - could not see the misery in Tara's eyes.

Tara felt a terrible revulsion for him. She lowered her head not revealing her mind. Everything is in the grip of the enemy. I have to save Angada whom this wicked fellow might consider as a remnant of the enemy and destroy too.

Seeing Vali lying lifeless, all people could not control their grief and shed tears. They wept loudly.

Lowering his head in shame, Sugriva tried to get tears in his eyes. 'All the people know that Vali spared me out of mercy, on some occasions even when he ought to have killed me. Now every body has come to know that I had such a brother killed deceitfully. If I do not exhibit my remorse, it will not at all look proper in the view of others from tomorrow. Every body wept for Vali'.

Sugriva looked at Rama and began to wail loudly. "Sri Rama! You kept your word and got me my kingdom. But... now I do not at all have any desire for the kingdom. When my brother, who was like my father, is gone, what will these kingdoms do for me? Why do I need these luxuries? Without my brother, I don't want even heaven. Riches and wealth may be obtained in any way...but how can one get a brother back? As long as he was alive, my brother treated me with great kindness. He used to get a little bit angry...but my brother was a great man. I have had such a noble man killed. I am wicked. How can a fellow like me be his younger brother?...Alas!...I can't survive. I shall throw myself into the funeral pyre along with my brother. I shall depart along with my brother. Rama! My entire army will search for your wife. I will not back out of my promise. Alas!...I can no longer live…", Sugriva began to wail silently.

Rama is fascinated on seeing Sugriva moan so well. Rama knew pretty well how pleased Sugriva is at the death of his brother and how anxious he is to ascend the throne…He is crying for his brother as per the custom. Yes…one should grieve dutifully. The ability to grasp Sugriva's inner self - the able man Rama alone has it!

"Sugriva! There is no use wailing! You have not realized that everything is god's decision. It is not you who got him killed. Nor is it I who killed him. It is not Vali either who is dead. We are all instrumental, you know!" said Rama and looked at Lakshmana with side glance.

Lakshmana - who felt sympathy for those women and Angada who had gathered round Vali and were wailing - sighed heavily grasping the caution of the looks of his brother and set about work.

"Sugriva! You have to console Angada… Why do you weep like a child? Hereafter you have to look after the affairs of the kingdom. Get up and make all arrangements. Tara! Why do you all delay so much? What more is there to see? Everything is over. Things should move quickly in situations like this. My brother is hurrying…See that the dead body is taken away quickly!...." so saying Lakshmana hurried all of them.

The palanquin arrived in moments.

Sugriva, wiping his eyes with his dhoti, said, "Hanuman! My honoured brother should receive a grand cremation. See!...There should be no dearth for any thing. Get sandal wood in carts. Pour ghee in full pots! Donate generously to all Brahmins…Alas! O elder brother!...How can I live without you? Take me too…Alas!" He raised his voice.

All people followed the palanquin weeping. Not being sure that his voice will be audible in those cries, Sugriva stopped crying.

The pyre is arranged.

Rama stood at a distance and was giving instructions and commands to the priests as per the scriptures.

Angada lit the pyre.

Tara said with grief, "My husband! Are you leaving us? Cannot we see you ever? Alas! How void are our lives without you" She swooned.

Sugriva looked around and ran towards the pyre saying, "I will not live any more… I shall jump into the pyre…I am a wicked fellow, Alas!...."

Hanuman and Lakshmana went towards him and brought him back holding each arm.

"Leave me. Let me die. Without my brother, I cannot live… Let me go." He again ran.

"Push that fellow, *the son of a donkey*, into the fire! Push him and Rama together!" some one shouted from the crowd in anger.

They brought Sugriva back again.

Then he sat down without a murmur.

Hanuman looked around at the people gathered and said, "It seems all of you are angry at Rama. He is after all only instrumental. Very docile. He is like a cow. He cannot harm even an ant. (*Except Vali!*) Why talk so much? He *cannot bite even if you put a finger into his mouth.* If you want you can see", said he and at once thrust his finger into Rama's mouth.

Rama was surprised, recovered and sucked Hanuman's finger and kept quiet.

Taking out the finger, Hanuman said, "Have you seen? How gentle he is? Has he bitten the finger?...Do you believe me now?", he said and saw the people with a smiling face.

People gathered round Hanuman and said, "Really not bitten?...Oh! How nice he is!...Let me see the finger." They forgot about his 'arrow' and concentrated on the 'finger'.

Some young men moved to a distance and are seriously discussing, 'whether Rama bites the finger or not".

"He will bite", said some.

"He will not bite. We have seen it", said some others.

"He has not bitten because it was Hanuman's. All of them are of the same flock. If it is ours why doesn't he bite? If you want to check, put your finger in and see"

"Tut, why should I put?...Shall I put my finger in the mouths of all and sundry? Talk properly". That young man got angry.

"I shall put my finger in Rama's mouth. Let us see what he does"

"If he does not bite, I too shall put my finger"

A *couple of valorous persons* went to Rama, lifting their fingers like flags.

First they approached Hanuman and said angrily, "We want to put our fingers into Rama's mouth"

"Oh!...How easy it is! Put your finger and you will know for yourself, how gentle he is…" said Hanuman and turned towards Rama obediently and saluted him.

Rama looked *serenely*.

One youth thrust his finger into Rama's mouth angrily as if saying, "Do whatever you like to do"

Rama made swallows and kept quiet.

Then another young man put two fingers in his mouth.

Still some others put left fingers, right fingers, cigar smoking fingers and fingers that blew their noses and wiped on dhotis and not wiped fingers - all fingers they put into his mouth.

Rama did not bite even a single finger, surprising!

He sucked all of them and let them go.

"It is surprising!" said some and look at Rama with reverence.

"There is nothing surprising! It is all pretension. Don't believe it" said one trying to convince him secretly.

All is over. Vali…mingled….in dust…air. Pyre abated. Coming away from burial ground, some lost their *burial ground gloom*.

Saluting to Rama, Hanuman said, "Lord! By your grace Sugriva is able to get this kingdom which would have been difficult to get. Now command what has to take place next. Sugriva will not do anything contrary to your command. Having got the crown, he worships you with respect. Crown Sugriva king with your own hands! If you get this also done under your auspices…none can defy you", Hanuman *prayed obediently*.

Rama observed that there was lot of opposition to Sugriva among the people. Though none expressed it openly, many are still upset at the death of Vali. There may not be impediments for Sugriva's coronation…but it will not be possible to wage a battle with Ravana immediately. First Sugriva has to settle down. He has to get the army under his command. He has to pacify the people. It may take some time even for him to understand this kingdom thoroughly. So waiting till then is a must.

Looking at Hanuman with a serious smile, Rama said, "Hanuman! You people should perform the coronation ceremony of Sugriva! Except in forests, I should not enter villages or towns. It is my father's order. There will be no impediments when all of you are there. Don't worry.

"Sugriva! Angada is your brother's on? He is fit to become prince. Make Angada your prince. Very soon the rainy season will begin. This is not the time for searching for Sita. If these four months pass, you can help me in the month of *Kartika*. Till then….."

Some body from behind the crowd said to the others in the crowd, "Battle with Ravana may not be possible but…how does the rainy season stand as an obstacle for searching of a wife?...Do all people stop their work during the rainy season?....He may sprout if he gets wet in rain!"

Rama stopped talking…heard well the distant words. But put up a serene face as if he had heard nothing. "Sugriva! I shall spend the time with Lakshmana in a cave of Rishyamuka mountain. You have the coronation immediately and make your kith and kin happy", he said with a smile.

"Yes! As you command"!" Sugriva bowed reverentially and saluted Rama's feet.

Sugriva's reverence for Rama is multiplying.

He feared that he might have had to spend all his life on the mountains but every thing has now turned round like a mystery.

★ ★ ★

Sugriva's coronation ceremonies commenced on a grand scale. Sugriva had the haunting fear of some or other obstacle cropping up at any time. But..nothing happened. Might be the command of Tara.

Sugriva went to the harem of Tara to honour her and bring her round to his side. Tara lowered her head, *shed tears like a stream* and she remained silent.

As the auspicious moment of the coronation was approaching, beautiful damsels bathed Sugriva, applied oils and massaged him delicately. They applied sandal wood paste. While they were decorating his body with the royal insignia…all pains of the body abated except the shoulder pain. When the crown reached his head, that pain too disappeared.

Sugriva moved around and looked to a side. He saw his wife. "Yes, yes! I had a wife!" He wondered. He *smeared a smile across his face* and asked, "How are you?...I have done all this for your sake, you know?"

Ruma blushed and lowered her head. [278]

Later charities were given to Brahmins liberally.

Worship, hymns and eulogy of Sri Rama are going on throughout the kingdom.

The court poets are singing songs, on the great qualities and extraordinary handsomeness of Rama's body, which they composed *sitting* day and night.

Raising their voice, the court priests are shouting at a high pitch, "Sri Ramachandra! Lord of Kosala! Follower of father's command! Saviour of the helpless! Punisher of the wicked! Protector of good people! Sea of mercy!........"

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[Translation: **R. Venkateswara Rao**]

There is no link between the 7th story and the 8th story.

The 8th story begins immediately.

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[278] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 2, last sloka:** "Sugriva brought his wife Ruma, had the coronation ceremony conducted in Kishkindha, informed this matter to Rama and was enjoying the kingdom like Indra."

Sugriva did not reject his wife who had been with Vali for some time. The women of that race did not have the *rule of conjugal fidelity*.

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Story-8

The True Colours of the Friendship

The clouds of the rainy season are making tumultuous noise across the sky like a marriage band.

Wandering across the whole forest, the wind is galloping while telling every tree and each bird, "The rain is coming! The rain is coming! Do you know that?"

"Let it come! Let it come!" the trees are nodding their heads with joy.

Looking at the sky, the birds felt disappointed, "Nay! It is all empty noise. Yesterday also it roared like this and then quitened down."

"A drop fell on my nose!" cried a baby parrot. Really, a rain drop is shining like a gem on its red nose.

"Mom! Who is rain?" baby pigeon born the previous day asked its mother. Their mother felt amused at the words of her kid. "Rain means...Rain is... It will come now?....I will show you. Okay?...A lot of water come from the sky", the mother laughed and pointed upwards.

"To whose house does the water come? To our house?"

"Nay, to all houses."

"Who will pour it? God?"

"Nay! Aren't there clouds...that are black...They fetch water from somewhere and..."

"Here! A drop fell on my wing too! Today, it will definitely rain," shouted a sparrow from a distance.

"All right! Let it come. What more do we want?" said the pigeon from the neighbouring nest.

The entire forest is filled with tumultuous atmosphere - with the wandering of birds, conversation of frogs, gambols of deer and the whistling of the wind.

Rama sat with folded legs like a sage under the *Turayi* tree and immersed in a deep thought - about battle with Ravana or the unfulfilled grudge against Kaika.

The Turayi tree is swaying a lot like a naughty girl. Tickled by the wind, it bursts into fits of laughter, swaying and falling towards the stream below the hill. It drops all its flowers into the stream. "Look! This naughty wind...not letting me stand," it giggled.

The wind swiftly replied, "Hey! Why do you blame me? Have you ever been stable? Always laughter and anger. You throw away all your flowers in the stream without any sense."

"Stop it! You talk as if you are innocent. Don't meddle with me. Why don't you go towards the Banyan trees or Maddi trees?...Why do you always tease me?" said the Turayi tree, trying to cope with its fight with the wind.

Interfering from behind the rocks, the Modugu tree tried to appease Turayi. "The wind is teasing you as you are still young. She used to do the same thing to me when I was young. Do you get angry for such a trivial thing? You have to laugh at it and keep quiet...." The Modugu nodded its head like an elderly woman.

That spacious cave on the Rishyamuka, abundant air blowing constantly, a stream that flows below the hill near the cave, a beautiful lake on the other side between the hills, the Pampa spread like a blanket studded with gems at a distance, farmers who always work in the fields toward Kishkindha, playing and singing of young people who graze the cattle in the forest, the rural folks who keep visiting Kishkindha from the surrounding villages - thus residence on Rishyamuka is comfortable and suitable for passing time for Rama.

Again a base after a long time having wandered and wandered for the last five months...since they left the Dandakaranya!

Days are rolling.

By now, Sugriva's authority is almost established in Kishkindha. There is no doubt.

"Do you know, it is raining?" the wind asked Rama who was lost in thought and Lakshmana who sat under the porch.

Baking palm fruits, Lakshmana sat in front of the fire as a cordon, stopping the wind. "Don't come this side. Oh, you are troubling me a lot! You are *taking my life*," said Lakshmana to the wind.

Hearing the tumult of birds, Lakshmana raised his head and looked around. He understands all the noises of birds. He knows pretty well how a particular bird makes its call and how the same bird makes other calls in several ways. Chit-chatting of birds when they are relaxing in the nests; calling friends at a distance; expressing joy on seeing fruits or insects; shrieking with fear on seeing hunters or snakes that intrude into the nests - Lakshmana understands every thing clearly.

Lakshmana understood the joy of the birds at the imminent rain. He raised his head toward the sky. Dark clouds are floating over Rishyamuka as if mountains were moving over mountains. Here and there, they are gathering on the peaks of the mountains to relax. It seemed one can climb across the steps of the clouds and put a garland round the neck of the sun.

It began drizzling. The wind is dispersing drizzles naughtily. Flying amidst the drizzles, birds are drenching their wings. Amidst the clouds, the cranes are flying in lines like white lotus garlands. Birds flying like flowers scattered like petals of flowers and going towards their nests.

The cowherds are driving their cattle owards Kishkindha with shouts and laughter.

Looking at the sky Lakshmana submitted o his brother, "Brother, sir! It seems it will rain heavily. Please get up and relax under the porch! I have cooked fish curry mixing it with tender leaves of tamarind, since you like it. I have baked palm fruits and red bulbs. Eat it while it is very hot."

Recovering from the battle that he would wage against Ravana, Rama looked at the sky and acknowledged. "Yes, this is the rainy season!" Immediately he remembered all the descriptions of the rainy season.

During the rainy season, streams, villages and everything become one. Rivers that *run rapidly* for the lovely embrace; mountains filled with streams that smell of different kinds of medicinal fragrance like the elephants' mast in the rutting season. - He recalled all descriptions. "Yes, rainy season is very charming", he nodded.

The entire attention of Rama is on the thoughts of battle. "Lakshmana! See the clouds are roaring like battle drums. With their echoing, mountains are roaring like elephants in the battle. In this season, Kings stop the wars. The fighting armies return home." Rama enjoyed talking about war for some time.

Rama felt affection for Lakshmana because he had cooked fish curry with tender tamarind leaves and baked palm fruits and called him for the meal.

"Lakshmana! Look at that bunch of clouds! See how beautifully the sky has smeared the sandal paste of evening light. Look, the sky is exhaling a mild breeze like the lustful man eager to embrace a woman!...In the rainy season, man feels extremely happy with the intimacy of women, you know!"

"Yes sir!" said Lakshmana. But he had a doubt. He remembered that his brother told him during the spring that it was spring alone which makes man very happy. Now, he says, 'it is rainy season that gives pleasure'. May be this season alone is great! Brother knows every thing!

The rain increased.

The Turayi branches were escaping from Rama as in a game. As his entire body got wet, he rose up quickly.

Embracing the rain water that was spouting intermittently, the earth is receiving it saying eagerly, "Have you come? Have you come?"

Emitting vapours emotionally, the earth sighed warmly, "My love! How unbearable was separation from you? Since how long have I been waiting for you?" Trees, grass, plants, stumps drenched in rain and swooning in ecstasy. The wind is carrying and distributing the fragrance of the earth all around. Drenching in the rain, the peacocks are meowing. Clouds are teasing the peacocks with their roars like peapocks. Black bees are afraid of the rain and are hiding under the leaves wherever they found a spot. The forest is wondering how all the trees bear *Neredu* fruits.

The entire world is bathing itself with the downpour of the rain. The sky has turned into a sea with high tidal waves. It is raining as if the entire sea is descending upon the earth! It is raining as if the sky has got wet, has dissolved softly and is sliding! Except that cave on Rishyamuka, all the surrounding world seemed terrible as if it is drowned in water. The rain is making the noise as if the sky has crashed and its stones slide against the mountain.

"Mom! It is frightening!" the baby pigeon hugged her mother.

"Nay!....don't get frightened. It will stop raining. See, how bold your elder brother is!"

"Mom! I am also frightened", said the elder brother and hid under his mother's wings.

"So, rain looks like this?...Tut! We should never have rain, Mom!" the pigeon wore a scared look.

"No, you shouldn't talk like that. How difficult it would be to all people if it does not rain!....You will see for yourself tomorrow? How many new tanks, new streams, new fish and new insects there are! You like the *Arudra* insects very much, don't you? They will come up abundantly like the *ant hills*. I will get a lot for you. Do you know how nice it will be two days after the rain?....There will be flowers wherever you look! Of many colours! Leaves will grow thickly on the trees! We need not have any fear. We can hide from the hunter under the leaves."

"Mom! Why is the sky shouting like that?"

"It is not shouting. The rain is falling from the clouds. The clouds are experiencing birth pangs. That's all!"

"Mom! Who lives in the sky?"

"I don't know kids! I have never seen it"

"We shall fly...fly...and go up...See whether there is god there."

"Oh, no. How can we go? If we want to go in the day time, it is so hot! We can't go! If we go at night, it is so dark!...We cannot go at all at nights."

"Won't god ever come down?"

"What, you are talking of god?" asked parrot from the neighboring nest.

"These two kids are eager to see the god, sister-in-law! They always ask me to show god! How can we show them god, sister-in-law?"

"When you say 'God', I remember one thing.....There in the cave on Rishyamuka.... there is a black gentleman you know!....He is god, they said."

"Tut, stop it...Rubbish!"

"Don't say that. He alone is god, they say. If you want let us go to that cave tomorrow.."

"What shall we learn even if we go and look? There used to be pigs always in that cave, weren't it there? When did god arrive?"

"Nay! It is not the pigs' cave, sister-in-law! Towards Kishkindha... There is a cave near the Turayi tree, isn't it?.... In that cave there are two ascetics living there, aren't they? The elder ascetic is god, they say. A great god, they say!"

"Where?...Are you talking of that cave toward that stream?"

"Yes, yes! Somebody abducted his wife, people say. Pity, they are in search of that wife and staying here!"

"Mom! We don't want an ascetic god! We will see a good god!" The kids are making lot of hullabaloo. Are they allowing their mother to listen to any thing!

Their mother got irritated and scolded the kids. "Didn't I tell you not to make noise while I am talking to others?" Again, turning to the neighbour, she started the conversation. "Well, how can he get his wife if he sits here? Why doesn't he search for her?"

"Nay! Hereafter he need not search her himself. Sugriva will look after all that. Why should he do all that once he has an agreement?

Sugriva alone has to search for her. Why won't he search? This gentleman killed that gentleman's brother. So, that gentleman has to search for this gentleman's wife. Till recently this gentleman himself was searching for her. But he stopped doing it after this agreement…."

"Very interesting agreement! Sister-in-law, you know many things about different places! I don't know how you come to know about them!"

"You are not coming out these days as you are busy with your kids. If we go towards Kishkindha, you can hear many songs about this man….He is a great man right from the childhood, they say!"

"Well, we can't believe each and every thing that people say. They tell things both real and fabricated. How do we know what people are whispering at their houses about this gentleman? We only hear songs, shouts and all that outwardly…"

"You have spoken well. Do you know what songs they sing about him? This man has killed several people, since he was young, they say….He killed Tataka! Killed Khara! Killed Maricha!... They also say that he cut noses and ears of some women…. Still some more people! Hell with my memory, I have forgotten all those names…"

"He also killed Vali, didn't he?"

"Yes, yes! That is it! He killed Vali recently for no reason! They say he would annihilate Rakshasas by killing still some more people!

"Tut! We don't want a god that kills, Mom!" the kids forgot their mother's scolding and again resumed their hullabaloo!

Ignoring the kids, Mom immersed herself in her conversation with the sister-in-law. "When you say killing, I remember one thing, sister-in-law! I saw with my own eyes when he was killing Vali. How do I know about this man? I am so scared of those arrows! Did we ever know about those things? That's why I am not going towards Rishyamuka." The mother pigeon took her kids to her bosom.

"Sister-in-law! He won't come to us. These days his eyes have fallen on fish in Pampa. He is not coming out of that cave because Rishyamuka is full of snakes. It is the little ascetic who does the entire drudgery. He is always seen piercing the iron rod into the fish and baking them."

"Mom! We don't want the god in the cave. We will see the god in the sky!" the kids are making a hullabaloo!

Kissing the kids, Mom said, "All right. We will go as you wish, after you grow up, okay? But you should not cry and ask me to carry you on the way, okay? So, now go to sleep. We can get up early in the morning and eat many insects."

"The red insects?"

"Mom! I want white ants …." Saying so, the kids fell asleep.

Like the infant who fell asleep while sucking milk, the whole forest drenched in the rain and became silent after the tumult.

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The sky is still frightening *like a devil.*

There was a flash of lightening somewhere and the cave got light once and darkness enveloped it.

In Rama's heart…Sita…Sita in Ravana's arms….it flashed….darkness enveloped his heart.

The wind was drenched completely in the rain and was coming for shelter in to the cave from the trees and hills. Whenever it came, it brought sounds of silver anklet bells and drum beats. Every moment, it is whispering in the ears of Rama, "Sugriva is watching dances. Listening to songs. Do you know?" It is carrying news.

"Yes, listening to them. I am listening to them daily." Rama is sighing.

How lucky Sugriva is! He is daily immersed in comforts and luxuries. He has got the kingdom. Got his wife….I too…after coronation in Ayodhya….with Sita…with Sita? Sita….her chastity? Can I admit my wife who has been in the house of another man for such a long time? Will the world appreciate it?

Sugriva accepted the woman whom another man had enjoyed. He is a tribal fellow. He lives in the forest. A noble man like me, a learned man like me should not do such a base deed. The scriptures ordained by highly learned people, scholars and sages do not at all accept if the husband admits his wife who has no chastity.

What are these thoughts?....Should I abandon Sita?....Great devoted wife Sita, will she yield to another man?....No, it will never happen. Sita is highly noble! Sita's mother too is a great devoted wife! People say Sita's grand mother was also a great devoted wife. Even Sita's sisters? All are great devoted wives. In fact the family in which Sita was born itself is the family of great devoted wives. Sita who was born in such a great family, will she even look at Ravana, *even raising an eye*? No, she won't. There is no doubt.

I have to think only about the battle with that wicked fellow. Every thing depends on Sugriva. Killing Ravana is not an ordinary task as killing Vali. It is a battle with the king of the Rakshasas! Need a huge army. Need treasury. Don't know what Sugriva will do and what will happen! Don't know who will win and who will lose! Killing Ravana, if I keep that kingdom too under my direct or indirect control… by then this exile in the forest will come to an end. The auspicious moments of returning to Ayodhya will arrive….will everything happen as expected? *Man proposes and god disposes*!

Rama sighed deeply. "Lakshmana! Is there any one who is as unlucky as I am! How many difficulties have I borne since I left the kingdom? How nice it will be if this exile ends well and we return to Ayodhya! That wicked fellow….to Sita who was alone….What is her fault?....Women are weak and helpless. How long will this separation with my lawful wife be! This rainy season…This cold breeze….These flowers…… These birds…this separation day and night… Alas!.....burning me!"

"Brother-sir! Don't grieve. Be courageous."

"What courage! This fire of separation is burning me. If I think of battle with Ravana, my courage is *totally* drained away…"

"Why do you talk like this brother-sir! You are losing courage because you are totally immersed in the sea of grief…..You don't know how valorous you are. Be courageous! It will not take much time. Once this rainy season passes, we can make all preparations to kill the enemy and go for battle. We can surely release sister-in-law from the custody of that wicked fellow. You are a great man who knows how to do a given job. You are devoted to god, atheist and enlightened. If you determine to do something, you can upturn seas, the hills, forests, the sun and the moon and in fact the earth itself. Then how does Ravana matter?"

Words are *jumping from* Lakshmana's *mouth* like the current of a river in the rainy season. It has become a habit to praise his brother for years. It has also become a habit for Rama to receive praise. The day on which Lakshmana does not praise and give courage to him, Rama's heart fills with despair. He loses heart and thinks that it will never be possible to conquer Ravana.

Words of courage, which Lakshmana says every now and then, protect Rama. They give him *strength of a hill*. Rama sighed, "Lakshmana! What is the use in my grieving while you are saying so much, wishing my welfare?....Can't I be without courage?" He nodded serenely.

The Turayi tree is vexed by the wind. It leaned on to the porch near the cave and lay down due to weakness. Looking at the entrance, Lakshmana came out quickly, saying, "It seems the tree is about to fall."

The Turayi tree drenched its whole body and shivering. It raised its head with joy as soon as it saw Lakshmana. "What a heavy rain! What a heavy rain! Have you seen it, Little ascetic?...Have you thought that I would break the porch?....I have just turned from the wind and leaned this side. That's all. You praise your brother daily. I have been listening to it. A while ago also…You were saying something....he will do something…to the sun, the moon and the earth. I could not hear properly. The noise of this stream…it is a nuisance. Will you ask your brother if he will make the rain recede. Or at least, it will be enough if he stops this wind. I am *not able to survive* because of this wind. It is not letting me stand. Who will save me from this difficult situation - except the elder ascetic?" The Turayi tree leaned towards Lakshmana.

Lakshmana looked at the tree, realized that there was no danger to the porch and went inside the cave.

The wind intruded into the cave from behind Lakshmana and ran up to Rama and said, "Oh, I don't feel like coming away from Kishkindha, you see! Do you know how beautiful those dancers were amidst whom Sugriva sat?"

All the thoughts of Rama are *revolving round* Sugriva. All the while pleasures since the coronation. Drinking liquor…Enjoying women…A fellow who is immersed in so many pleasures, how can he help me? Can't believe. He got his state power…What friendship will remain? How noble is he, one who helps in return for the help he has received!.... Are all people so noble? "Lakshmana! Sugriva is daily immersed in sexual pleasures. Do you think he will remember the promise that he made? Do you think he will help me as per his promise?

"What brother-sir? Will the Vanara king dare to defy your order? [279]

Rama felt relieved. The clouds at the peaks of the hill stopped for a while, relaxed, became light and moved from there.

The intensity of rain had receded.

The wind too, afraid of the cold, stopped roaming. As the rain receded, the Rishyamuka, surrounded by water, looked like a crescent moon rising from the sea. The streams all over the mountain were jumping down with laughter rolling the rocks along with them.

After the continual down pour the sky is tired and turned red.

The rain on the hills stopped.

The streams jumped for a long time remained silent. The hill stream is rushing with joy and uproar. The trees and the creepers on the bank looked at the hill stream and asked, "You always move slowly and talking pleasantly. Why are you rushing so much today?"

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[279] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 27, slokas 34 to 40, sarga 28, slokas 18 &19:**

See how Rama is thinking about Sugriva, Ravana and himself. "Conquering the enemy and living with his wife and in a great kingdom, Sugriva is enjoying great pleasures. Whereas I left my kingdom, lost my wife and am wailing *as if the bank of a river is collapsed*. My grief is great. The rainy season is difficult to bear. Ravana is a very powerful enemy. It seems it is not possible to conquer this fellow." Rama is afraid of battle with Ravana. He is grieving.

Lakshmana's consolation: "Rama! In this world you are a man of action, devoted to god and a theist. You have power to upturn the earth filled with seas and hills. Tackling Ravana is not difficult." - Rama is devoted to god. Theist. This means, Rama believes in god. Worships him with devotion. It means Rama is not a god. God is somebody else!

The poet always says Ravana is a powerful king. He says so because Rama is going to conquer such a great man soon. But the poet keeps saying how difficult it appears to Rama - who has no support whatsoever - to fight with Ravana. Again, he makes Lakshmana tom-tom about Rama's valour every moment since it won't look nice if Rama is afraid of Ravana. Lakshmana praises Rama a lot and at the end, he says, "Rama! I am waking up your valour from slumber". It is to say, "Rama has valour, you see!" He has valour but it always sleeps. But his 'fear' is always awake. It won't fall asleep!

Kishkindha kanda, sarga 28, slokas 62 to 66: After the coronation of Sugriva and since he started living on Rishyamuka, Rama has been doubting whether Sugriva would help him or not. It is not that he had confidence for some time and then begun doubting. Doubting right from the beginning. Trying to suppress his doubts, Rama is convincing himself. 'Sugriva is a good man!... He is not a person who does not break his promise!'

"Sugriva will realize the scheduled time and try to reciprocate help. No doubt. (*It means, there is doubt!*) A valorous person who receives help will surely help reciprocally. (*Fearing that he may not help!*) Good people blame the person who forgets others' help and does not do help reciprocally. (*It is his confidence that he will help him at least due to fear that others blame him.*) Lakshmana's consolation to his brother, "the Vanara king will fulfill all your wishes soon. Be brave until autumn approaches."

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The hill stream smiled and said, "Those days were different. How is it possible now?.... I have to go quickly.... What can I do?.... I will not forget you." Saying so and touching the feet of the trees and promising them, the stream *ran away*.

"You are going to your in-laws' place. This is the reason for your hurry. We know that", the trees made fun of the stream.

Lakshmana rose up, put couple of wood pieces in the dying fire.

"The porch is leaned a little bit. I have to wake up early in the morning and fix the wooden pillars tightly.... This is rainy season.... Continual rains.... If the porch falls, there is no way to light the fire." Lakshmana said to himself. After he made sure that his brother went to sleep, he too was ready to go to sleep and kept a sword with him. "I will cut him into pieces with one stroke..." , thinking so, he lay down.

Touching Lakshmana's back gently, the cool breeze lulled him, "You are tired of drudgery the whole day. Lie down comfortably, at least now. Go to sleep!"

The clouds have scattered about to a large extent. The sky has become clear and shining as if it has taken a dip in the stream and risen up. The wind is roaming the entire forest to see whether the rain has receded or not.

The moon had hidden some where as long as it was raining but has come out after it has stopped raining and is climbing the hills.

Lakshmana is about to fall asleep.

"....Oh! Lakshmana! Can't bear! Can't bear! This wicked fellow... arrows... arrows... Alas!... Lakshmana!...."

Lakshmana rose up with a jerk. "Who is it? Who is it? Brother-sir! Where is he? Where is he? Where is that wicked fellow?" He caught hold of the sword hurriedly.

"Lakshmana! Alas!....This cupid...flower arrows...dumping!"

"Flower arrows?....Cupid? Who is cupid? I will kill that fellow...." Lakshmana's eyes are heavy with sleep. He raised his sword and began to brandish it in the cave for the cupid.

Rama is *tossing and turning* on the soft grass bed. "....This cupid....with flower arrows... Alas!....torturing me a lot! I can't bear.... this separation...Rainy season....the harshness of this Cupid...."

"Cupid! Has he come again?....Isn't there any way to punish that fellow?....What is this trouble every night?"

"Alas!....Lakshmana! This cupid....so fearlessly...."

"Excuse me brother!...I lay down at the entrance. There is no chance of cupid coming in?"

"Alas! Cupid is bodiless! He has no body...."

"How can a bodiless fellow hold arrows, brother! Is he throwing arrows at you?" He was about to ask but stopped that question.

Brother may say, "Even those arrows do not have body!"

I may be tempted to ask him, "Then, how will those arrows hit our bodies brother?" Already brother is suffering, why have a discussion at midnight?

"Oh, Sita!... My Love!.... I no longer can bear your separation, you see!... This rainy season... This cool breeze... Fragrance... All are troubling me. Alas, Alas!.... These sharp arrows...."

"Brother, sir! Please be calm. I think they are not flowery arrows! If they are flowery arrows, they will not hurt so sharply! In these surroundings there are many jungle mosquitoes. They are of the size of a honey bee. They rise up due to this rain. I'll fan you. Sleep peacefully brother!" Lakshmana crawled in the darkness of the cave, moved his hands here and there and got hold of a leaf fan.

"Oh, no! These are not mosquitoes, Lakshmana! This is the cruel act of Cupid. The arrows of cupid are sharper than Rama's arrows. This rainy season is playing second fiddle to the cupid. Drinking water from the clouds, *Chataka* birds are singing in pairs. Listen! Sita! My love! Because of your separation....Cupid so mercilessly...."

Lakshmana has a doubt - if his brother is suffering from a stomach ache because of the palm fruits which might have upset his stomach and it is not anything to do with Cupid's wickedness! I shouldn't say such sinful words. That cupid never shot even a single arrow at me? I don't know, why! I can't say, what the reason is! Why does brother feel anxious if arrows didn't fall on him?

Roaming the entire Rishyamuka, the wind said, "Can you hear Rama's shouts? You know, people in Ayodhya sing glorious songs that this gentleman is *Jitendriyudu* (conqueror of senses). Recently, people in Kishkindha have also started, saying it you know!"

"Jitendriyudu means one who shouts well."

"Tut!...Jitendriyudu means conqueror or of senses."

"Senses means"

"Eyes, ears, mouth and nose"

"What does 'conquering them' mean? As if conquering enemies? Are senses enemies?...Well who will conquer them? Mind...?

"No, soul! So all the senses are enemies of the soul. That is why one should not yield to one's senses. Should not have infatuation as well as hatred for any thing. One should not have hope and hopelessness about anything. One should treat both happiness and sorrow equally. One should treat dust and gold alike. Only then one will become a conqueror of senses!"

"It is crazy to become a conqueror of senses! If there is no hope, there will be hopelessness. If there is no hopelessness, there will be hope. If there is no light, there will be darkness or light when there is no darkness! Death or life; or life or death! They are opposed to one another, aren't they? Then how can we treat them as one and the same? It is possible only for crazy fellows. Perhaps, conquerors of senses mean, 'mad fellows'! Otherwise, why do they see any enmity between the senses and the mind within the same body?"

"Not 'mind'.... 'spirit'....."

"All right, spirit...."

The Turayi tree is trembling. "Why do you talk about spirits during nights. I am afraid. Why don't you talk about it in the morning?"

"Okay, we will stop talking about it", Rishyamuka gave courage to Turayi and said smilingly to the wind, "Since you took the birth of a wind and me the birth of a hill, we are living as per the laws of nature. But by bad luck if we too were born as humans, they would have killed us with their *Vedanta* saying, '*Conquer your noses! Conquer your faces*'. Rishyamuka frightened the wind.

Rama lowered his voice and was still moaning.

Lakshmana had an uncontrollable anger for cupid. What is this shooting of arrows every day on a man who is sleeping? If he has guts, he ought to come face to face and fight...What is this secret action?...Naughty action!

"Didn't your brother shoot arrows secretly on Vali? Why didn't you ask this question then?" said some one!

Lakshmana swiftly turned his head and looked around. Darkness all around! Silence! Except the sighing of his brother's romantic separation."

Fanning...fanning...and fanning, Lakshmana threw the fan on Rama and fell asleep.

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Moving around Rishyamuka as much as they can, the cattle are grazing. The boys who have brought the cattle for grazing, tied their pots of curds on branches of the trees and began to play.[280]

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280. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 30, slokas 48 & 51: Roaming of cowherds around Rishyamuka is not contrary to Valmiki. The poet himself mentioned farmers and cattle breeders. While depicting autumn, Rama describes the fields with crops and the flute music as follows: "Eating the fully ripe paddy and carrying away the ears of corn with their beaks, the beautiful herd of cranes is going on like a garland of flowers.....The sounds of the flutes of cowherds....increased and spread by the morning breeze...the sounds of pots, cows and bulls....increased one another." ★

Rama always wonders a lot on seeing their sport. They climb trees swiftly and with a knack like monkeys. They hold the branches and hang like bears. They jump with ease from any height like birds. Their running and hide and seek games round the trees!

The entire forest plays along with them. All the hills laugh along with them. While they play flutes, the wind roams round them with fascination. They roam all through the forest, pick different kinds of flowers, make two-arm long garlands and put them around the necks of their buffalos and cows. They also put them round their own necks.

Playing, singing and roaming round trees, they pluck all the fruits that they find. They dig bulbs, bake and eat them. After eating everything they empty all the little pots of curds.

They don't notice when dusk falls. As the dusk falls, they drive back all the cattle to the stream.

Sitting under the Turayi tree, Rama is watching their sport in the stream. As they hold the tails of the buffaloes and enter the stream and as the buffaloes drag them into the current like boats…their laugh…shouts…what a joy! It seems strange to Rama! They swim in the water for a long time. They hide under the water like fish. They take a dip here and come out at a distance! Like water birds they float half way and swim. They swim on; play for a very long time…shining like cherries…sit on the backs of buffaloes that glisten like black stones…like *child-Yamas* (gods of death)…they start toward Kishkindha.

Sometimes…while seeing their sport… Rama remembers his boyhood days. All the games he played were with balls, bows, swords. The servants used to sit him on the horse back with silk garments and ornaments all over his body. Maid servants used to surround him, massage his body with oils and bathed him. In the evening, they used to take him on beautiful chariots for pleasure trips. What ever he did…it was maids, servants or teachers who helped him… he never played freely like the Vanara children.

"How will I feel if I sit on the buffalo!" Rama is puzzled at his own thought and looked around. Whenever he entertains such thoughts, Rama is puzzled a lot. He neither stops entertaining such thoughts nor does he stop puzzling at them. However much he tied to be serene, thoughts unknown previously cross his mind suddenly.

"How base are these games! These are the games that lowly and rustic people play. Princes like me do not go for such lowly sports. Teachers don't agree", he frowned.

He calls Lakshmana and enters into a Vedantic discussion. If Lakshmana goes for fish in Pampa, for fire wood, water or for bulbs, Rama sits watching the surrounding forest. Looking at the cracks in the hills, valleys and caves, he thinks, "How skilfully gods have made these things!" If Lakshmana is within his reach, baking bulbs or cleaning the surroundings of the cave, Rama tells him how gods were born, how they live in different worlds, what great miracles they do, how one can get their favour. - He tells him about every thing.

Seeing elephants which go in herds for water, Rama says irritably, "Elephants step into the lake, swim about and make it muddy". He feels sad because elephants roam in forests wastefully. He tells in detail how to hunt and collect their tusks and bones and how much strength a king acquires if he provides himself with an army of elephants.

Except when he goes into the cave and relaxes on the bed of leaves, he constantly hears some tumultuous noise when he sits outside the cave under the trees - shouts of farmers from distant fields, songs of rural folk, laughter of cowherds or some thing or the other.

Cowherds have prepared bows and arrows with bamboo sticks. They are daily learning to shoot the targets. They lay bets on shooting arrows. Forgetting all other games, they are spending all their time in the game of shooting arrows.

Suradu always wins in shooting arrows from a distance.

"Shall we play the game of Rama killing Vali?" asked Suradu one day suddenly.

"Yes, yes, let's play." All other boys

gathered round Suradu. Every one is enthusiastic at the idea of a new game.

"While the older king and the younger king were fighting, Rama shot an arrow from behind the tree and killed the older king, didn't he?....We will play all that", said Suradu.

While the boys were clamouring, Rama came out of the cave and stood under the Turayi tree, watching the children who were playing at a distance.

"Who will play the role of Vali?" asked Suradu.

"Me"

"No, I will play it!"

"I only play it!"

"I too will play it!"

"Tut! Don't quarrel like that! Any one fellow can play it. How is it possible if all fellows want to be Vali? Tell me who will play the role of Rama?"

"........"

"Why don't you fellows talk?....Chandrudu! Will you be Rama?"

"Ugh! I won't. I will be Vali"

"Kusumudu, will you be him?"

"I too won't...I will be only Vali"

"Then who will play the role of Rama?"

"Nobody will. Who will be Rama! So senseless!"

"Chandrudu! Why don't you play Sugriva!"

"Ugh! Ugh! I will play Vali only!"

Suradu became furious. "Then, *lick the arm pits*! How can we play the game if every body wants to be Vali?"

"If you want, you be Rama? You are asking us, aren't you?"

"Tut! As Rama? Me....?" Suradu frowned. But recovering immediately he said, "All right! I will be Rama. This is only a game, isn't it? What is wrong since it is only a game? How will the game proceed if nobody plays it?....Then, Kusumudu! Will you be Sugriva?"

Kusumudu *turned away his face horizontally* and said, "If you want I will be Lakshmana. I will neither play Sugriva nor Rama.

"Then you don't play"

"All right...I won't. I don't want this bloody game" Kusumudu went away to a distance angrily.

All the boys gathered round him and began to beg him. Suradu also approached him and said, ".....All of you said we will play, didn't you? Then to play this game, do we or don't we need Sugriva and Rama? Am I not playing Rama's role? Likewise, if any other fellow plays Sugriva, we can start the game at once, can't we?...." He looked at him as if he were convincing him.

Kusumudu stood adamantly.

Terudu came forward boldly. "All right! I will be Sugriva. Let Kusumudu be Vali." He brought the matter to an end.

"Yes, it will be nice if Kusumudu is Vali" said every body.

Though Kusumudu is only ten, he is fat, tall and looks like a bear. His mother breast fed him until he was eight. Although she still tried to continue to feed him, he stopped as he became interested in playing.

Suddenly remembering something, Terudu said, "I will be Sugriva only for today. Tomorrow I will be Vali, you know?" He stood as if he were insisting to confirm the next day's programme. "Yes, quite right. One fellow on one day, another fellow on another day", said every one.

"Let us start the game, now", said Suradu enthusiastically. "All of you stand at a distance. First, Vali and Sugriva should fight each other. Whereas, I will shoot an arrow from behind the tree. Vali should fall down. Then I will come to the front...."

Frowning, Rama is looking from under the Turayi tree. Flapping his ears, he is listening to them. All the words are not clearly audible. The wind is running towards the boys, wishing to watch their game.

Kusumudu and Terudu are thrashing each other. The boys who gathered round are encouraging Kusumudu.

Terudu got angry. "If this is the way, I will not play", he went afar and stood there.

Suradu came running from behind the tree and shouted at every one. "You fellows should not speak anything. You have to just stand watching." Again, he went back to the tree.

Again Vali and Sugriva started fighting. Kusumudu is giving death blows to Terudu.

"You want to fight with me? *With your life*, will you defeat me?" Kusumudu is fiercely thrashing Terudu. Terudu is seeing with fear.

Then suddenly an arrow came swiftly and hit Sugriva. Terudu, who has already put a crying face, cried loudly when the arrow hit him on his shoulder.

Suradu came out quickly from behind the tree.

Kusumudu got angry at Suradu as if he was insulted. "Who is Vali, he or me?....Why did you hit him?" Kusumudu began to quarrel.

Suradu begged Kusumudu. "In fact, I wanted to hit *you only*. But that fellow came in between. This time, you stand toward the tree, okay? Not so far. Come closer and fight. This time, I will hit you." He repeatedly told Kusumudu and abated his anger.

Meanwhile all boys gathered round Terudu and consoled him, "Poor fellow, what could Suradu do? It was a mistake. You should not cry in games…."

Suradu took the bow and ran back to the back of the tree.

The fight between Vali and Sugriva started again. The two are thrashing each other as if they have had hostility for generations.

An arrow came swiftly and hit Kusumudu in his back. He did not expect such a blow from an arrow. Now, he realized why Terudu had cried a while ago. With uncontrollable anger he showed the point of the arrow to all and said, "See how sharp he carved the bow! See how hard he hit me!"

"I will set him right", he ran towards the tree.

Suradu, who was about to come from behind the tree with pride, began to run back. Suradu in the front, Kusumudu at his back and all the boys behind the two!

All of them caught Vali. "How can you get angry in a game? He shot the arrow because he was told to shoot. Poor fellow what can Suradu do?" they quarrelled with Vali.

"Even if it is a game? Do you know how hard he hit me?....All right this time I will be Rama and break your back", Kusumudu scolded Suradu.

"All right. You can do that. But now you have to fall down. Otherwise the whole game will be spoilt", said all.

Vali, checked stones and the like on the ground, pushed the stones aside with his feet and lay on the ground slowly."

The other boys brought an arrow, kept it in the arm pit of Vali and put his hand close to the arrow and the arm pit.

Vali started moaning. Rama came to Vali with hesitation and fear.

Stopping to moan, Vali looked at Rama fiercely as if he would get up and thrash him.

Rambhudu leaned on to Vali and whispered, "You have to speak to Rama. You should ask him, 'Why did you hit me?' "

"I know that. I will ask him", said Vali irritably. Looking at Suradu, he rose up half way and shouted, "Why did you kill me? What mistake had I made?" The boys pressed Vali down.

"Why don't you tell me? Why did you kill me?" Vali shouted again.

Swallowing his words, Rama said, "Well….you…banished your brother…why?"

"I might banish him. It is my will. How are you concerned about it....Where did you come from?" shouted Vali.

Rama took two steps backwards and said, "I, I….I….I….."

He looked around.

Rambhudu whispered something into Rama's ear.

"Yes, I am a great king. I am a greater king than you, you know....I'll kill all those who do wrong. Why did you do wrong?" 'Suradu-Rama' looked angrily.

"Did I do wrong? Say it again, *I will smash your teeth*. My younger brother did wrong. That fellow tried to kill me. Instead of killing him, why have you killed me?"

It didn't occur to Rama what to say. He looked at Rambhudu. It did not occur to Rambhudu either. He looked at Gimbhudu.

"Why don't you tell me?....Tell me first why you have killed me from behind the tree?" Vali got up roaring.

Rambhudu suddenly fell on Vali, pressed him down and shouted at him, "You should say, 'Why did you hit me?' You should not say, 'Why did you kill me?' Do you know you are not yet dead?"

Kusumudu said angrily, "Our older king died, didn't he? What if I say, 'You have killed me?'....I will say that only." He looked at Rama and roared. "Why do you stand without answering me, *like a deaf lamp post*?.... Tell me why you hit me from behind the tree!"

'Suradu-Rama' with hesitation and looking in various directions, mumbled, "If it were direct, you would have seen me, wouldn't you?"

All the boys laughed loudly.

"If it were face to face....I would have *torn your belly and make a drum*. If you want, come on fight with me!" Vali is about to rise swiftly and sit down.

All the boys pressed Vali down. "Oh, you have to die", they said irritated.

Correcting his words a little bit, Rama said, "Not that. I said wrongly a while ago. You know why I killed you....I promised Sugriva". Rama looked at Vali boldly.

"Why did you make such a promise?" roared Vali.

"I promised", said Rama with hesitation.

"That is what I ask you. Why did you promise?"

"You ask me why?....I promised, that's all. It is my will!"

Vali swiftly rose up. "You say, it is your will?" He was about to catch him.

Terrified, Rama started running along the trees.

Vali running behind Rama hurling abuses! The rest of the boys behind Vali, shouting! All of them ran throughout the forest. Finally, after Vali caught hold of Rama and thrashed him, the game ended with the yells and cries of Rama.

After he came out of the *possession* of Vali, Kusumudu felt very sorry for having thrashed Suradu. He put on a sad face.

"I will not beat you next time. I will not beat you", he said many a time. He even took an oath.

Crying, Suradu quarrelled, "I will not be Rama. You be Rama!"

The boys played that game on many days with great enthusiasm. Gradually, Tara, Hanuman, Angada, Lakshmana and every one entered the game.

Now no one agreed to be Vali. Every one wanted to be Rama. Although everybody realized it was a game, Rama's arrow had not realized it. Because it came like a real arrow and hit Vali like a sword!

Rama on Rishyamuka....These days he is not sitting under the Turayi tree.

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The rains have completely receded. With the joy that they gave the *alms of water* to the world, the clouds became light and floated like tiny pieces of cotton. The sky turned into a goddess of peace with its smiles. Wherever we look, the entire earth is filled with yellow silk blankets! New plants and new flowers!

All the stumps have become resplendent with leaves. All the hills are covered with bushes. The reed bushes across the banks of the stream filled with star flowers. *Asokas, Sarjas, Vegisas, Sapta varnas, Kovidaras* and *Prenkanas* are blossoming daily on the slopes and edges of the hills. There is no limit to *Kasi* flowers. They are falling in heaps over the boulders.

Rishyamuka is turning into a kingdom of birds at dawn and dusk. Many coloured birds, like flower bunches and garlands - as their shadows have increased ten times and spreading the shadows across the hills - fly away covering the mountains with their wings.

The wind is wandering between Pampa and Rishyamuka continuously. Gathering many kinds of fragrance, it is *arrogant like the rich people*.

The autumn nights are *smearing themselves* with moon light.

While Sri Rama is living in the forest facing many hardships sitting under the Turayi tree or Modugu tree, farmers at a distance in their fields are tilling the land, sowing seeds, harvesting and farming very 'comfortably'.

While a great enlightened man like Rama leads a 'noble life' - saying prayers mornings and evenings and engaging in Vedantic discourses - the neighbouring stupid rural folks live in ignorance and are entangled in family ties. They weave baskets and the like and make pots and the like. They carve ploughs and sickles. They cut logs and wood. They struggle like worms and insects confined to a mean and lowly life.

While Sri Rama is depressed with the unbearable grief of separation from his lawful wife, hundreds and thousands of soldiers are leaving their wives and children cheerfully and going for battles. They are facing valorous death in the battles.

The wind brought the fragrance of *Mogali.* "Oh! How big are the Mogali bushes around Pampa! It is frightening even to me to intrude into them....How thick are Mogali bushes like swords! If you want, ask Lakshmana", said the wind to Rama.

"Yes, yes! This is autumn..." Rama nodded his head *serenely.*

Smiling, the wind ran toward the stream.

Rama is reminded of the descriptions of autumn. In this season the cupid provides himself with more means. Cuckoos, peacocks, swans, *Chakravakas*, Black bees, flowers - every thing beside him.

Sita is already far away from him. These nights of autumn...in the custody of another man!

Rama's mind is troubled like a sea with high tidal waves.

A terrible dream last night. Sita, with strange jewels and ornaments all over her body, was very happy with sparkling smiles. She was playing with birds and deer. If I have this kind of dream on Rishyamuka, will it become untrue? Since I climbed this hill, I have been worrying what sort of dream I would have! My dream may be true! If it is not true, how can I have such a dream on this mountain? Oh! This means, Sita is happy! She is happy even though she is separated from me! She must be *floating* on all comforts and luxuries. She might be sauntering in beautiful mansions...Now, when can I have Sita back!....When shall I see the end of that wicked fellow? When shall I wipe out his race totally? All sages requested me a long time ago to kill the Rakshasas. I have promised them I would kill Rakshasas as per their wish. Thirteen years have already passed. Because of Surpanakha, it was possible to kill Khara...Otherwise, is battle with a Rakshasa king possible? Battle with an enemy whose whereabouts we don't know!

Rubbing its *hands gently*, Rama's soul said obediently, "If I think about it, I feel ashamed. Already eight months have passed since Sita had been gone! So far...Where she is ....What about her...Unable to locate...."

Rama frowned. "We will locate, wait. It is a matter with a Rakshasa....Is it so easy? Because of this rainy season.....that has come in the way...Otherwise...."

"No! Yes! I too am saying the same. Like god, Sugriva is supporting...We will somehow find out *tomorrow or day after*. Months and seasons are passing on...That is my worry...That's all!...."

Rama sighed serenely. "Yes. Time is passing on." He sat down at the foot of the tree and closed his eyes.

Climbing the hill with the bundle of dry sticks, Lakshmana saw his brother from a distance. Dumping the bundle quickly in front of the cave, he approached his brother and stood obediently. "Brother-sir!

"Lakshmana!...Have you come?"

"Brother-sir! Don't grieve! Have courage!"

"Lakshmana! I am unable to bear the separation from Sita! In this autumn, the cupid....with fresh enthusiasm....men like me who are deprived of lovely embraces...."

Turning his face, Lakshmana looked towards the fire place to check whether the fire was still burning or had stopped. He went quickly, lit two sticks and came back.

"....This season is causing me too much grief", saying Rama.

Earlier...I remember that brother had said, the rainy season...or spring causes too much grief. May be this season is the most wicked season! Brother knows best!

The smoke is rising slowly from the fire place. Looking at his brother with deference, Lakshmana said, "Brother!...I am not worthy enough to advise you but.... You are valorous...Yielding to lust....grieving while thinking about lust always... shows lack of self-respect. You have to reconcile your feelings with the mind. You have to control the body....Noble men like you...."

"Lakshmana!...All this grief is not for my sake....! Sita, who has been away from me for a long time.... my *better half*...can she be living happily....That wicked fellow....her...."

Lakshmana knew that his brother's entire grief was over the *wealth of chastity* of his wife. "Brother! Forget your doubt and rest assured! That Ravana cannot win the wife of a valorous man like you. Who can have enmity with a great hero like you?"

Rama's *face* is *becoming little bit bright*. Inside... some movements... questions.... fears.... True, I am a great valorous man! A hero. But...Sita is not so valorous, is she? A helpless woman....*woman with a creeper like body*....flower-like body...beautiful body. Fearing my valour that lustful man....base fellow....will not spare her because I am away....will he? What enmity will he have afresh with me? He was prepared for enmity with me the day when he abducted Sita, wasn't he?

"Brother! You should not grieve so much. You should not feel so disheartened. You are not aware of your valour. Your valour is *like a fire covered with ashes*. You have to keep your mind brave always. You have to make your efforts cheerfully. I will assist you. Any way Sugriva will help you...Do not doubt that your task will not be fulfilled...Forgive me brother!....To a great man like you....I am not worthy to advise you...."[281]

At that moment, the entire mind of Rama is filled with great enthusiasm. Yes I am a great valorous man! A hero! I have with me.... Lakshmana and Sugriva...!

As he remembered Sugriva, his great enthusiasm has been watered down. Sugriva's attitude is beyond Rama's comprehension. 'He did not visit me even once after his coronation. I thought he would spend his time serving me always with great respect, humility, fear and devotion...it seems he does not at all remember me. He is concerned with his own luxuries, his own pleasures....whereas I....! What is the *way of getting to the bank from this sea of sorrow* if Sugriva does not help me? How to locate Sita? How to get her back? Sugriva will not violate his promise, will he? I have been suspecting that things like this may happen.

All the limbs of Rama are trembling. "Lakshmana! Have you heard if Sugriva is making any preparations to go to war?"

Lakshmana hesitated for a moment. "Forgive me brother! I have not heard. In case....either today or tomorrow...."

"Ugh! What will he do now? He has become the king. Why will he remember a friend

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281. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 30, slokas 14 to 18: See Lakshmana's service to his brother and also consoling his brother every time. "Lakshmana came back after collecting fruits from the mountain-peaks....saw his brother who was alone and fainted with grief...and said, "Reverend Brother! It is not proper to insult your valour by constant thoughts of lust. Once in a while you have to reconcile your mind. Oh, brave man! Your attempts, mental stability, brave ideas, help of Sugriva and others.....all these are the bases for the fulfilment of your task....This you should realize!"

Lakshmana knows very clearly about Rama's doubt regarding Sita. It is not Rama's fear whether Sita will be found or not. But, Sita may be spoilt. To remove that fear, see what Lakshmana is saying. "Another man can never win Sita, who had you as her husband. Will there be any man who will not get burnt in the blazing flame?"

The job of Lakshmana includes not only doing drudgery for his brother but also giving him courage *every part of the day*.

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like me? Why will he have mercy on me? How lucky he is! He is constantly immersed deep in pleasures. Whereas I?....I am *swimming in the sea of grief like a river whose bank was collapsed.* My past deeds are troubling me like this. I lost the kingdom. Lost my wife. My friend too has violated his promise. Without having any sympathy that I have taken refuge in him, he has completely ignored me…." Rama *sighed with fumes of fire.*

Lakshmana is trembling with anger. "Yes, brother! Sugriva has violated his promise. He has completely forgotten your help. The ungrateful fellow! We should not be merciful to such a wicked man. We must punish him."

Rama realized what he ought to do. He is deep in thought. He is not unaware of the boldness and courage of Sugriva! He is a big coward. Fool. Let him be a king, let him have a big army, he cannot dare to defy me. If he does, I will threaten him that I will ruin him completely. He will not be unafraid.

Sugriva's violation of his promise, an opportunity to punish him, Sugriva's apology and his subservience in humility - this thought seemed to be very good for Rama. 'Does a tribal man have the sense to know, when he should perform a task? If he had such sense, he would be equal to me! Can the *Vanara* king be equal to me in greatness?....No, never. That's why he is behaving like an ungrateful man. Because of this negligence, he will behave with more reverence towards me than before.' - As he thought more about the wrongs of Sugriva, Rama's mind was very satisfied.

"Lakshmana! I am hesitating because punishing a friend is not fair. But, is it avoidable to punish if a friend becomes a foe? He has fulfilled his needs. Happily, he has become a king. Daily he is immersed in the base pleasure of lust. Forgetting what is good and what is bad, he is spending his time in intoxicating drinks and pleasures. Doesn't he know that he should engage his men to search for Sita after the end of the rainy season?.... Does he violate his promise, unless this is his arrogance? He made me believe him and got his work done. Will he not do his duty?.... What did he think of Sri Rama? It seems he is fearless, thinking, 'Rama is without a kingdom… has no army…. what harm can he do to me?' Lakshmana! Start at once for Kishkindha. Return quickly after settling the matter with that wicked fellow! Tell him, I said that there will be no more a base fellow than one who forgets the help which others gave him! Tell him I said that there is no more meanness than enjoying women disregarding the distinction between day and night. Ask him if he would like to taste the pain of Rama's arrow. Tell him, though I killed only Vali in his case I will destroy him completely along with his relatives and friends. It is not enough to immerse deeply in lustful pleasures, tell him *I will drown* him in *Rama's arrows.* Wicked fellow, he will *straight away go and meet* his brother. Have you heard all that I said now? Remember all I have said, tell him clearly how furious I am. Start right now! Why delay?"

"Yes, yes, brother-sir! After you take your meal…I will start today. I will do the work as you have instructed. How can he ignore the promise that he made to you, unless he is a wicked fellow?.... It was all because of your kindness that he got the Kishkindha kingdom, didn't he? If he has forgotten your task… then we should not let Sugriva remain as the king. Why should that wicked man enjoy all the royal pleasures?.... If you decide to, you can deprive Sugriva of his kingdom in a moment. I cannot control my anger when I think of that ungrateful fellow. Without giving you any trouble, I will send him to Yama's world with one blow. We can make Angada the king. He will search for my sister-in-law…. I will not let Sugriva live." - Thinking that his words would make his brother very happy, Lakshmana was *burning with anger* at Sugriva.

Seeing Lakshmana's emotion, Rama frowned. 'I wanted to threaten Sugriva just like that ….will this man really kill him?....It is safe that Sugriva supports me since I killed Vali, but if Sugriva is also killed….will there be any way to come out of Kishkindha with life?....Although it is true that Sugriva and Angada have enmity, at the moment Sugriva has more power than Angada in the kingdom. What is the guarantee hat Angada will join me if I have enmity with such a powerful fellow as Sugriva? Will Angada elieve me when I have killed his father and *ounger father*? How will a battle take place with Ravana? We have to get things done leverly by persuasion or threats....If I see this man's anger, it seems he is going to spoil the whole thing in haste!'

With an attitude to criticize Lakshmana, Rama looked at him *serenely*. "Lakshmana! It seems you are going to do things your way ndependently, setting aside all I have said! Just ecause of a slight mistake, shall we kill our riends? It is not proper to talk such sinful words n haste. One who controls his anger is really a noble man." Rama continued his scolding as if he was preaching sermons to Lakshmana out of affection.[282]

Lakshmana stood with a bit of surprise and feeling embarrassed. His common sense lost its speech in surprise.

Rama was still nodding his head *serenely*. "....Do not speak amicably because he is our friend and don't abuse him harshly either. Tell him whatever I have asked you to tell him. Do not spoil the business by creating enmity in emotion. In fact....had you not defied my order then....had you not left the cottage....."

Lakshmana felt slighted and lowered his head.

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282. **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 30, slokas 66 to 85 and sarga 31, up to 8 slokas:**

Rama's grief that Sugriva is not helping him, his abusing of Sugriva, criticizing Lakshmana when Lakshmana said the same thing which he said - Now see all these things.

Rama's grief: King Sugriva is not kind to me - who has been exiled, who lost his wife and who s grieving. The wicked Sugriva does not care for me thinking, 'This Rama is deprived of his kingdom. He has no refuge. Insulted by Ravana, he is in a pathetic condition. Leaving his house, e has come a long distance, become lustful and sought my refuge.' He set the deadline after four months to search for Sita, got his work done, became wicked and not minded the scheduled time. *Rama talks of 'searching for Sita' but does not talk much about 'help for the battle' because it von't look nice if he always asks help for battle!*). Turning wicked, interested in base pleasures, auntering with women of the harem, drinking intoxicants along with the relatives, Sugriva did ot show mercy on me."

What he asked Lakshmana is this: "I killed Vali in order to search for Sita. (*Vali committing a nistake, Rama's attempt to establish justice - what happened to these arguments? Since Sugriva nows the actual secret, Rama is reminding him the same!*) "Sugriva! The other world to which our brother has gone is not yet destroyed. You too will follow the path of Vali. I killed only Vali. will kill you - who has abandoned truth - along with your relatives and friends." (*Including Ianuman!*) So saying for some time, again at another place Rama says, "Tell Sugriva that he need ot fear that I will kill him since he has violated the time limit." (*Then, why did he say first that he vould kill him? It is only to threaten him! If he has enmity, how will the remaining affairs ontinue? Rama knows all that. Not killing Sugriva is not out of compassion for him. Because was not possible.*)

Lakshmana's anger at Sugriva: "Sugriva is an ungrateful man. Such a characterless fellow hould not have the kingdom. Now I will kill Sugriva who has abandoned justice. Vali's son ngada will help us search and find Sita."

was Rama who said that he would kill Sugriva, wasn't it? But see how Rama becomes wild at ese words. "A person like you should not commit the sin of killing a friend. You should not even ntertain the thought of killing your friend. (*I alone should entertain it!*)

Always finding faults with others, preaching morals to others, thinking that he is a great nowledgeable and noble person - all these features constitute a 'feudal mentality'.

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Seeing Lakshmana's silence, Rama felt a bit uncomfortable. Did he feel hurt? Why is he silent? He always exhibits humility….

Rama sighed…. "All this is my bad luck. What have others done? God is making me grieve like this….!" He lowered his head and was immersed in sea of sorrow.

Two small birds from the Turayi tree ran away towards Pampa.

"Mom! Mom! That ascetic god is coming!" they told their mother.

"Who is the ascetic god, kids?"

"That one. The one who is in the cave! With a big beard…looks like a devil"

"Oh! Is it Rama?....Doesn't have arrows with him?"

"We have hidden ourselves, you know!"

"Well, I don't understand you….You do the same thing which I ask you not to do. Do you heed any of my words? …. Did Rama see you?"

"He has not raised his head! He is weeping."

"Why?"

"Poor fellow! That no one is searching for his wife…."

"Why can't he search for her himself?...the rainy season has passed, hasn't it?"

"Sister-in-law, they had an agreement, hadn't they?" - From the adjacent nest.

"Enough of such useless agreements! If he waits in the name of agreement, will not some danger befall her?"

"Don't you know? That danger will not befall her!"

"Why?"

"She is a great devoted wife! Except Rama, none can touch her, people say…"

"Then why should he weep and wail and search for her?...She will come whenever she comes."

"Mom!...What is a devoted wife?"

"Devoted wife means….she should treat her husband as god?"

"Then whom should she treat as her husband?"

"Brother! She should treat the god as her husband" - Sister bird!

"Nay, not like that. She has to treat god as god, husband as god"

"Why two gods, Mom?"

"Well, I don't know, you see! How do we know the craziness of humans?....Go and ask Rama."

Lowering his shoulders, Rama was still sobbing, "…. If it were not my bad luck why should I have lost the kingdom for which I was entitled? Why should my wife - who came with me as a pair of birds does - be taken away from me?... At last, even my friend has also violated his promise…. me… in this grief…."

Lakshmana recovered with a start. 'Since how long has brother been wailing. I was lost in thoughts…' "Forgive me, brother! I will behave amicably with Sugriva and get the work done. Do not wail. Get up and take your meal. I will go." He brought water quickly. He brought baked bulbs, roots and prawn curry filled in the leaves. "Brother! Today I cooked prawns mixing with the *Vaakkaayalu*. I could make it very tasty. Eat heartily."

'It is tasty?'... Has he eaten before I ate or what? Rama looked from the side of an eye at the curry, while washing his hands.

Lakshmana felt that his words were awkward and he corrected himself. "While the curry was being cooked…. Smelling the tasty aroma…. I thought that it was tasty…" Lakshmana stood with his bowed bent and fanning him gently.

"Oh! He only smelt the aroma?' Rama was lost in thoughts while eating the curry. 'Should Lakshmana smell the aroma before I do? Isn't there anything wrong?....I think it is not wrong. I think it is not wrong to smell without eating. Yes, no fault. It is wrong if he had eaten it….but what is wrong in smelling it?....Scriptures do not find fault with it. Yes, it is not contrary to scriptures. Curry…very tasty…prawns make me forget fish!'

After his brother's meal was over, Lakshmana put the fan down and got his bed ready in the cave. "Brother sir! Take rest. I will return after the work is done."

"You must come back soon, Lakshmana! If it is dark…."

"I will return before the sun sets. May I take your leave?"

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Lost in thoughts, Lakshmana is walking kicking the stones and the like. His commonsense is asking him fearlessly. ".....He is such an enlightened man? Why doesn't he ever understand your heart?", it said.

Not allowing his attention go to his commonsense, Lakshmana is diverting his thoughts towards Sugriva. As soon as I arrived there, I should admonish him, "What happened to your promise?"....I should first say, "Just because our help is over, you have forgotten our brother's cause and immersed yourself in pleasures." What will that vile fellow say?...What more can he say? He will say, 'Today....tomorrow...' He will mumble some thing.

"Put that matter aside. First tell me about your brother. Why does he always try to find fault with you?" asked his commonsense.

Lakshmana frowned. "Hearing Sugriva's words, I should not *melt* and show mercy. He made friends in the presence of fire, didn't he?....Doesn't he have sense to respect his friend?...I shouldn't keep quiet." Lakshmana is walking taking big strides.

"You are going to reprimand Sugriva... but...this much anger...any time...on your brother...at least one tenth of this anger. Have you ever replied to him countering him?"

"Look...Don't harass me like this always. I have dedicated my life to *serve at the feet* of my brother. Whether he scolds me...beats me...kills me...every thing at his mercy. If I feel hurt any time...I feel depressed for a moment...but later, do you know how ashamed I feel? - This is the last time I will tell you. I will not keep quiet if you meddle with me."

"In fact, you only tell me without shame", common sense laughed and kept silent.

Lakshmana walking furiously. "How arrogant Sugriva is....that he has become the king! If my brother decides....he can take revenge in a moment. I have to tell the same thing. I have to depict the entire valour of my brother. At least then, the wicked fellow will learn things."

Lakshmana reached Kishkindha. Kept his hand ready on the sheath, setting right his bow, he was walking in big strides.

People in the royal street... looked at Lakshmana with surprise...Those who recognized him whispered to others.

"....Lives on Rishyamuka? This man is the younger ascetic...."

"Is it Rama?"

Nay! Rama is this man's elder brother. He is the elder ascetic. You were not present in the town when he killed Vali...."

"It seems he is angry at somebody... Look that side..."

"We will come to know if we wait for some time...Why has he come."

The news that Lakshmana had arrived in the town reached the ears of Sugriva in turn....but it did not enter his head.

"How do I know who Lakshmana is? Ask him to get out...If you come again, I will get you beheaded" Sugriva got wild in his intoxicated mood and lay down turning on to the other side.

Seeing houses, shops, toddy shops and temples, Lakshmana was walking along the royal streets. Forgetting his anger, he was surprised. After so long a time...from forests into a town...coming into the midst of people...he was eager to look at them keenly.

Remembering his brother's orders, he suppressed his curiosity and sustaining his anger he reached the entrance of the fort.

Hearing about Lakshmana, Angada came out.

As soon as he saw Angada, Lakshmana said seriously, "Angada! Inform your *younger father* that I have come. Unable to bear the grief of Sri Ramachandra, I have come to take revenge against your younger father, you know!....Go at once and tell him!" Lakshmana look at the facial expressions of Angada keenly.

"I will surely inform him", Angada said obediently and went inside.

To go into the chambers of Sugriva,

Angada took two ministers along with him.

All the three talked to each other, gathered courage and went to Sugriva.

"Your Excellency! Lakshmana has come"

"Lakshmana has come, your Excellency"

"He is at the entrance…."

"He is angry…at the entrance, Your Excellency!"

"Has he come again? Ask him to get out…You too get out", the king angrily said and turned the other side.

"Not again, Your Excellency! He has just come ….Rama has sent him, he says…."

"Who is Rama! Oh!....He is troubling me! Ask him to get out quickly"

The ministers looked at each other's faces. Also looked at Sugriva's face.

The king was fully drunk.

The ministers *bit each others ears.* They *bit the ears* of royal physicians.

Drinks and medicines that make the intoxicant ineffective *intruded into* the king's *belly.*

Irritated by the tumult in the stomach, His Excellency rose up angrily and asked, "Why are all of you are here? All right! You can stay here. Quick…Get some liquor! Yes, quick…."

"Please have it your Excellency", the physicians served another vessel of medicine.

His Excellency drank it, frowned and said, "….From where did you get this? Call this shop keeper and sentence him to death at once…" He threw the vessel angrily on the physicians. The ministers escaped the blow of the vessel and gathered courage. "Your Excellency!... Lakshmana has come. He is furious. It is up to you to decide what to do now!" They said and remained silent.

. The king *jumped up and fell down,* "Lakshmana?.... Is he furious?... Why? What has happened?"

"We don't know… Rama has sent him, he says… Rama is like Rudra with anger, he says…."

"Rama?.... Like Rudra with anger?" King Sugriva began to remember things slowly one after the other. Rama…. Vali… Arrow… coronation…. Sita… Ravana…! He was perplexed and looked around. "Why? What wrong have I done?...How good I am! Why has Rama got angry at me?...Somebody who does not like me must have gone to Rishyamuka and grumbled against me to Rama! Find out who they are and sentence them to death…."

"We will sentence them your Excellency!....How big a job it is?...We will catch those fellows wherever they have hidden. But, what about Lakshmana? He is burning with anger!...."

Sugriva was startled again. "About Lakshmana?....Does he have a bow on his arm pit?"

"Yes…he has arrows and also swords"

"Oh! Swords too?" Sugriva folded his legs and pressed himself between the silk pillows. "Why is he burning with anger?....What is this? Why am I thinking? *Am I ministers*? Why are all of you not thinking?... Call all the other ministers. Think why Lakshmana is angry. If I were *ministers*, I would have thought about it"

Hanuman also came and joined the ministers. While all the ministers gathered at a corner and began to think, one minister got an idea without thinking. "Why do we think about why Lakshmana is angry? He himself will tell us, if we ask him, won't he?" He threw this idea.

"Nay. We should not believe him. If he tells a lie…? Let us ourselves think, come on!" said minister Hanuman.

The doubting minister remained silent indifferently.

Adjusting his necklaces and sitting with his legs against the wall, Sugriva said, "You may think that I am afraid of Rama. Nay! Not that. Just like that…. It won't look nice if a friend gets angry unjustly…. Have you finished thinking?" He hurried them on.

"Finishing your Excellency!... It won't take much time… We are in the middle…."

"Are you still lingering in the middle of your thoughts….? It is easy to make friends. It is not that difficult…It is enough if we light a couple of sticks, increase the flame and go around it. The whole difficulty is in sustaining friendship. The mind is fickle. It does not remain stable. That is why friendships get spoiled…. Have you moved from the middle of your thought? Carry on, quick… Oh! What sort of ministers are you? You take so long?"

Á small doubt your Excellency! You said, the mind is fickle. That is why friendships get spoiled. You have not said whose mind it is! If you don't say exactly whether Rama's mind is fickle or your mind is fickle… how can we conclude who is responsible for spoiling friendship? Do you want us to consider Rama's mind as fickle? Do you want us to add this point and think?"

"Nay!... Rama is noble? Very noble!"

"Yes sir!... Then do you want us to consider your mind fickle?"

"My mind? Ugh!" Sugriva swallowed his words and adjusted his necklaces. He stretched his legs and again folded them. "*Lament as you like*! Do it yourself. You are ministers, why do you ask me? *Am I minister*s?" He became furious.

All the ministers gathered at a corner, mumbled some thing and thought the thing out.

"Finished your Excellency! We have thought it out!"

"Already over? You rush every thing. Have you *properly lamented*? Alright, what have you concluded?"

"You have made a mistake, your Excellency! Rama helped you and you have forgotten to help him in return."

"This is too much. Why did I forget? Is this what you have concluded? Is it not for searching Rama's wife that I sent a word to all the soldiers? Why do you talk as if you don't know about it?....What Nila! I asked you to see to all that headache, didn't I? What have you been doing? Have you again fallen asleep?"

"No, your Excellency! Since I made a mistake sleeping on Rishyamuka, I swear that I have not closed my eyes again. I sent a word as per your orders."

"I told you to impose the death penalty on all those who do not report in ten or fifteen days, didn't I?..."

"Yes! Your Excellency! I will get all those people killed who do not turn up!"

"I have made many arrangements. Then what is my mistake? Ministers, you tell me! Yes, Hanuman, you tell me?"

"Yes! You have made arrangements, but you have immersed yourself in your pleasures, Your Excellency!"

"My foot! What should I do until they come back?"

"..……."

"Did I alone immerse myself in ple...su…res? You too have been smacking your tongues watching dances and prances, haven't you? Hanuman sat with me the whole night and drank plenty?....Why doesn't he say about it?"

"Yes! We did drink, your Excellency! What a great taste! I *cannot forget it for ever…. for any number of births*"

"All right! Why do you talk about its taste! Now taste Rama's anger"

"Nay!....Why will he get angry, King? He is a very calm gentleman! May be he is showing his displeasure in order to taunt you!"

"You stupid fellow, is it displeasure? You said Lakshmana brought with him swords and arrows, didn't you?....burning with anger?"

Hanuman puffed out his cheeks and was lost in thought. He thought and thought and his eyes turned red. "Yes, he will be furious. You have to keep quiet. Fault is yours. Do you take Sri Ramachandra lightly? If he holds that bow in his hand…why should I say….we have seen with our own eyes how Vali fell to the ground, haven't we?....Will you continue your enmity with one who has the strength of weapons? If Rama decides…he can occupy all the worlds. We are telling you in many words since we wish for your well being. Just as a wife ought to be under the control of her husband obediently, you too ought to be under the control of Rama. You have to do whatever he wants…."

Thinking with a lowered head, Sugriva frowned. "You say I have to do whatever he wants…Then what about a battle with Ravana?....We don't know where this bloody Ravana is. If he is found, I should sentence him to death…Should he have abducted Sita? Aren't there any other women in the world? Did he finally find only Sita? Now on a large scale…a battle means…?"

"Your Excellency! Listen carefully! If a king wants to rule stably for a long time, it is not enough if he alone is safe, you know! He has to increase his treasury. He has to keep his army under control. He has to protect friends who are favourable to him. Only if the treasury, army and friends are strong, can a king rule fearlessly. Call Lakshmana at once and beg him. You shouldn't be unwilling…. even in your heart…. about doing Rama's work."

"Nay! When did I think that?" King Sugriva is perplexed. "All right! All of you go and get Lakshmana here!" he ordered *serenely*.

After the ministers left, king Sugriva was thinking of what he should do as soon as Lakshmana came: either to stand, sit or hide somewhere!

Sugriva heard harsh sounds of the bow hitting the floor. Angada came inside and said, "Lakshmana has come!"

"Has he come? How is he?"

"He is fat, like a bull"

"Tut!...Not that. Has his anger abated?"

"It has increased"

Sugriva rose up trembling. "Stay here, Stay here. Don't get him now…You go!…You stay!…." Sugriva paced up and down and ran inside. "Tara! Angada says Lakshmana is very angry. What do you think, why he is so angry at me? Think very quickly! My brother had told me long back that you think well. Think hard. Yes….quick…"

"Your Excellency! All the ministers have thought out and advised you, haven't they?"

"What advice, stupid fellows! They said it was my fault. Stupid fellows. How good I am! You go and talk to Lakshmana first. Somehow try to calm him. Later I will talk. Of course I am not afraid. However angry one is, he won't say anything to a woman. Go quickly…."

With the gentle sound of her ornaments all over the body, Tara started slowly, thinking. Sugriva is afraid. He is not a bold person like Vali. Though he is a king and has an army to support him, he is afraid of Rama, obliged by the promise he made. It is not good to abandon him without helping him. It is not safe for Kishkindha if Sugriva surrenders and acts according to the will of a foreign king, out of fear for Rama. I have to grasp the cause for Lakshmana's anger and act tactfully.

On seeing Tara's arrival, Lakshmana felt somewhat shy and sat *serenely*.

Tara began to converse with him affectionately. "O Prince! All of us feel sorry to know that you are angry. The king is feeling very sad not knowing the cause of your anger. Tell us, lad! What mistake have we made?....Who has offended you?" she asked.

Lakshmana looked angrily. "Should I tell you my self what the cause for my anger is? Don't you how reckless your husband is in respect of my brother? He promised to help my brother within four months, forgot every thing and immersed himself in royal pleasures!....What should my brother do if not feel angry?" said Lakshmana quickly.

Tara looked calm. "True that Sugriva is engrossed in pleasures. But he has not forgotten the promise he has made. For that, he has been making arrangements", said she, with a smile.

Lakshmana remained silent, but was furious.

Tara said again, "It is surprising to see that you are so angry although Sugriva is at fault. He is your friend, isn't he?....He is your brother, isn't he? He made friends with you with fire as the witness, didn't he?"

"……………………………"

"We have heard too many stories of great sages, who were wealthy due to their penance, but yielded to sexual pleasures and ruined their penance which they had performed for thousands of years! Then what is the fate of Sugriva? What is there that a man like you cannot understand?....Sugriva wished for royal life only for the sake of these pleasures, didn't he?

"………"

"You have stopped here itself because, you know all the royal courtesy. Please come into the harem, my lad! There is nothing wrong if a virtuous person like you looks at other women with *good heart*. If you come along with me, I will take you to the king." Tara invited Lakshmana inside respectfully.

Lakshmana rose up *serenely*. Going through several chambers, they entered the chamber of Sugriva.

Sunk amidst silk pillows in a spacious seat, Sugriva was looking from behind, surrounded by women.

Lakshmana thought that it might not be an intelligent thing to have enmity with Sugriva, having come deep inside and being totally under the control of Sugriva.

Though he had weapons with him, there were guards in the entire fort. On seeing Sugriva who was looking scared, Lakshmana, who stood there hesitantly, *gathered anger enthusiastically* and became furious with reddened eyes.

Making noise of his ornaments, Sugriva rose up slowly trembling.

Lakshmana looked at Sugriva *as if* he was *burning* him. "You wicked fellow! Are you enjoying pleasures while your friend is depressed in hardships? Unable to understand your nature, my brother gave you the Vanara kingdom with great mercy. There is expiation for every sin in the world but there is no expiation for the sin of ingratitude. The only justice is to kill an ungrateful person like you. Not only your brother, but you too are obliged to taste Rama's arrows." After burning with anger and not knowing what to do later, Lakshmana stood looking at the walls, doors and seats.

Tara looked at him with a smile. "Lakshmana! You are speaking harshly. You have expressed your anger. It is good! But realize that Sugriva has not given up his friendship with you." She remained silent.

Lakshmana turned his look toward Sugriva *serenely*.

Suppressing his trembling, Sugriva came a couple of feet forward, held the hands of Lakshmana and begged, "I cannot forget Ramayya, you see! Ramayya has presented me all these riches and wealth. Nay! Why do I forget him? As I had fallen into a deep sleep, I woke up ten days late, that's all! You have to *stomach my faults*. I shall definitely serve Ramayya….You have to forgive my mistakes."

Lakshmana was overwhelmed with the pride of his success since his mission ended properly and smoothly. In fact his anger had abated to a large extent with Tara's words. With Sugriva's apology, his joy knew no bounds. "Sugriva! I spoke a little harshly since I could not bear my brother's grief. Don't think other wise. *Don't keep this in your mind.*"

"Oh, no. Oh, no!"

"Seeing your humility, obedience, your good qualities, your good nature, it is clear that you are the rightful person to rule the Vanara kingdom. I had thought differently but you are the right friend for my brother… Gods have brought you both together. If you help, how big a task it is for my brother to conquer the enemies!"

"Though you are saying all this out of love for me….but…does Sri Rama need my help?....He can defeat his enemy….It is enough if I stay behind serving him….what will it mean if others help such a great hero?"

"Sugriva! My brother is *drowned completely in the sea of sorrow*. You should also come along with me, console him and give courage to him. My brother will be very happy if I go along with you….Don't mind that I abused you a while ago!"

Sugriva's trembling stopped after the *burning* Lakshmana calmed down completely. With smiles, he said, "Yes, I'll come…I'll surely come…I'll come now itself." He looked around.

All the ministers *came on their wings*. Sugriva asked his ministers joyfully. "I ordered all the soldiers some time back, have all of them come back?"

Nila came forward and submitted, "Sir! Some have come but some more have not yet come, your Excellency!"

His Excellency frowned angrily. "All right, sentence all of them to death! Look, Hanuman! We have to go on war against Ravana for the sake of Rama. Now, we need a lot of people. Announce by the tom-tom throughout the country that all people must come immediately to participate in the battle…understand?"

"Understood, your Excellency!....We will do it, but.... people listen to tom-tom, go their own way... but do you think they will come to the battle, your Excellency?"

"Do you understand only this much? You have to drag all those who don't come, man! Send thousands of employees. If people don't come to the battle and don't yield to good words, appoint employees who will drag them even by punishment. Some fools always enjoy sexual pleasures and luxuries. Bring all such people to me! If people don't turn up as per my order within ten days, implement the death sentence for those. Look, ministers! All of you together must make arrangements for the battle, you see! Hanuman will be the commander above all of you. Follow his instructions! Understand" said Sugriva. He turned his face and looked at Lakshmana as if he asked, "Have I made the arrangements well?" [283]

Lakshmana felt very happy seeing all the arrangements that Sugriva was making. "Well...then...shall we...to visit brother...."

"We will start right now!....Look! Get the palanquin. I have to go to see Rama. Yes, quick...palanquin....."

The ministers ran in a hurry.

★ ★ ★

The entire Rishyamuka was beating the drums. The conch horns, clarinets, cymbals, small drums - all are subdued under the battle drums.

Blowing from over the stream and through the Turayi branches, the wind intruded into the cave and irritated Rama by not letting him sleep. "Let us see who is coming!... come on! It may be a marriage procession, let us, come on!... come on!"

Rama came out of the cave, stood watching from the edge of the hill.

People were coming in mobs towards Rishyamuka.

The *hills* were *breaking* with the drum sounds.

Glittering brightly like the sun, the palanquin ascended the hills.

"Sugriva is coming...." Thought Rama. His heart felt very hurt. He is coming on a palanquin with royal pride. He could have come walking with humility and deference to me - who had helped him greatly. Should he come in a palanquin? Till recently, he had roamed about on all these hills, hadn't he?

The palanquin was crossing the hills with the swinging movement of the bearers.

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[283] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 37, slokas 9 to 13:** Sugriva is telling Hanuman. "Send many Vanaras to call crores of Vanaras. Some Vanaras pass their time in sexual pleasures. Send messengers to call Vanaras quickly by means of *samadanadi upaya* (samadanadi upaya means controlling people by various means: by pacifying them (*sama*), by giving them money (*dana*), by splitting them (*bheda*) or by punishing them (*danda*). See what that Dandopaya is!) "Sentence to death those wicked Vanaras who violate the king's order and do not turn up within ten days as per my orders"

Before Lakshmana arrived in Kishkindha, Sugriva raised his head from his deep sleep, ordered to mobilize army and fell asleep again.

Kishkindha kanda, sarga 29, slokas 30 to 34: "Looking at Nila, Sugriva ordered Nila to mobilize the entire army from all sides."

"You have to impose the death sentence on those Vanaras who do not join the army in fifteen days. In this matter, you need not hesitate" - This means, the fact that Sugriva had to impose death sentences in order to mobilize the army implies that participation in the battle was not at all a matter of interest to the people. This means not even a single person would come if there was no threat of the death penalty. This, Sugriva knew pretty well. Vanaras were indifferent to Rama's task. If they had come willingly why would the need of the death penalty arise? ★

Many a time Lakshmana fell on Sugriva in the palanquin. They missed many accidents when both were about to fall off.

Sugriva called out to Hanuman angrily and said irritably, "Sentence the bearers of this palanquin to death…after they put it down."

"Yes sir! I will punish them. I had thought at the beginning to give them this punishment." Hanuman agreed.

Involved in their shouts and sweating, the bearers of the palanquin were climbing the hills.

Standing for a while, Rama went to the Turayi tree, sat under it with folded legs, as the people were approaching.

The sounds of drums reached the front of the cave. People came rushing out running and occupied all the hills. The palanquin came and stopped in front of Rama.

Lakshmana and Sugriva climbed down.

Lakshmana approached Rama and said. "Brother-sir! I have carried out the task that you had ordered me to. Sugriva has come for your *darshan*(audience). He submitted to him saluting him.

Rama opened his eyes *serenely.*

Sugriva bowed, saluted and stood with his head turned aside, feeling embarrassed.

Seeing Sugriva, Rama *immersed* in lot of surprise.

This was the first time that Rama had seen Sugriva since his coronation. He was shining with silk garments and great ornaments all over his body. With that crown, his face had a royal look. Surrounding him, there were many hundreds of servants, ministers, soldiers…how much a physical power!

Standing around Sugriva, his servants were fanning him with *white whisks.* The wind was trying to throw away the white whisks. Some servants held silk umbrellas over Sugriva under a tree. The wind teased those umbrellas too. The Turayi tree spread over the people and showered flowers around.

Rama was still deep in thought.

What a luxury for Sugriva who had roamed an these rocks with fear for his life every moment! How many comforts! What great royalty!... Me too…in Ayodhya… with more riches and wealth… with luxuries…. with comforts.

It was me who gave all these alms to Sugriva! Does he remember it?

He wanted to harshly reprimand Sugriva as soon as he arrived - but a fellow who has such a great status…in front of a big force…

Nodding his head, Rama said *serenely*, "Sit down my lad!"

After Rama ordered him, Sugriva sat down at once in front of Rama. The fragrance of the roots of the white whisk is suffocating Rama.

"My lad! Since you had coronation, you have been deeply engrossed in sexual pleasures day in and day out. I have heard of it. There is nothing wrong in enjoying sexual pleasures while accumulating wealth. Each has its own time, my lad! A man who abandon duty and wealth (Dharma, artha) and enjoy sexual pleasure all the time will be *ruined like a man who sleeps at the end of a branch and falls down.* He is a dutiful king who annihilates all his enemies and strengthens his friendships and enjoys pleasures in accordance with the time."

Feeling embarrassed and lowering his head, Sugriva was listening.

"You might not have forgotten the promise you made to me. You have to search for my wife and wage a battle against Ravana. This is the time when all kings go on expedition. I don't know what you have thought out about this with your ministers and what you plan to do, it is your wish," said Rama and suddenly he burst into tears. "How many hardships my wife must be facing in the house of another man? Though alive, I am non-existent". He lowered his head.

Sugriva - who feared how much more Rama would speak complainingly - got a lot of courage because Rama's scolding ended so quickly. With folded hands he began obediently, "Rama! By your grace I have become the king. I know that an ungrateful man is a base fellow, you see! I will never forget your help. To fulfil your task, I order all the people of my country to join in the battle. Already many crores of people have come. Still many more crores of people will come. It is only you, who have to start for the battle. All of us are obliged to follow you, aren't we?"

With the pleasant news that Sugriva was mobilizing crores of warriors, Rama's mind became as light as a cloud in autumn. Sugriva's army alone will organize the burden of the battle. There was no doubt about.

With *blossomed* face, Rama showered smiles. "I know, Sugriva! I know right from the beginning that you are very noble. What is strange if sun gives light to the worlds and moon showers the moon light? There is no surprise in your reciprocal help to your *bosom* friend. That is why, I am without worry. I have delegated all my affairs - good and bad - to you and trust you. That Ravana *has stolen* my wife only for his own end. How much time will it take to conquer enemies if I have your support?...It won't take much time…yes…I know…."[284]

★ ★ ★

People in Kishkindha discuss secretly in groups in their houses, fields, gardens, hills and wherever they are.

"All of us must go to the battle! Other wise the king will sentence us to death, they say"

"As the proverb says, *it is death if you go to battle and it is death even if you don't go to battle*!.... For that matter why the hell should we give our lives for the king of another country?"

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[284] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 38, slokas 16 to 24 and also sarga 39, slokas up to 7:**

Sugriva came to Rama in a palanquin.

Since Sugriva had become a king the poet did not like to make a king walk amidst rocks and boulders - even though it was to see Sri Ramachandra! Here for the poet, Sugriva is greater than Sri Rama! Because Sugriva is in a great position and has riches and wealth.

"Sugriva who has great lustre (*what colour did he smear? Earlier he did not have this luster*), reached the best place where Sri Rama was staying and climbed down from the palanquin along with Lakshmana.

Without putting any question concerning the welfare of the person who had just got down from the palanquin, Rama caught hold of him and began to preach sermons. See! "King of Vanara! A king ought to divide dharma (duty), artha (wealth), kama (sexual pleasure) depending on the appropriate time. One who abandons dharma and artha but is preoccupied with sexual pleasures will be like a man who sleeps at the edge of a tree and wakes up only when he falls down. A dutiful king is one who kills his enemies and makes friends and enjoys dharma, artha and kama according to their appropriate time. (*It does not matter whatever Sugriva does, after killing Ravana and protecting Rama*). The time has come to locate Sita and wage a battle against Ravana. You have to discuss this matter with your ministers. (*The real essence of his sermon is: that he has to wage a battle!*)

Sugriva's reply: "Owing to your grace, I have acquired the Vanara kingdom, which is permanent. Crores of Vanaras - who will kill Ravana including his relatives and get Sita - are approaching you."

"On hearing Sugriva's efforts in searching for Sita, Rama's face turned into a blossomed blue lotus out of joy."

See, how Rama then praises Sugriva: "There is no wonder if the sun dispels darkness in the sky, if the moon makes the earth cool with his rays and if you reciprocally help your friend. (*Also if Rama changes his words!*)….You are gentle. A hero!....You alone are a good hearted friend of mine. (*Rama could not get a better friend than Sugriva despite roaming around for so many years!*) You alone are suitable to help me (*This is the actual fact.*) I know that you always speak good words." (*I know but I abused you a while ago just for fun!*)

★

"Our king had come to an agreement that he would wage battle on his behalf"

"Ah yes! He may have come to an agreement. Why doesn't he? Does he have to fight? He will sit in his chambers. What pain will he have?

"Talk slowly. It seems you will get it in the neck"

"All right…what did Rama actually say when he killed Vali? Did he say that he was roaming around to establish dharma (justice) as per the orders of his younger brother?.... Is it not injustice that Ravana abducted another man's wife?...Then why does not Bharata - who ordered to stop injustice and establish justice - punish Ravana and make arrangement to establish justice? - Oh, that means, using the army and treasury of Kishkindha, the Kosala king will establishment justice! Aah!... What an establishment of justice!.... Shameless establishment of justice!..."

"It is crazy on our part to expect otherwise. Why does he act in such a way that will cause a loss to his country?....He will get his things done using the army and treasury of another country…."

"I ask you as I don't understand it… suppose Vali and Sugriva had not had enmity. Suppose both of them were living amicably as they did in the past! Then what would have Rama done? On whose army would he have harboured hopes? Then how would he have searched for Sita?"

"If Vali and Sugriva had not had enmity, he would have created it!.... Was Rama not capable of working out a compromise between the two brothers? His own brothers adore him with devotion! Doing slavery to him! Is Rama not aware that Sugriva too should have treated Vali with respect?.... Nay!.... Then why did he not unite them? Because he would benefit if they had enmity."

"You have said very well. Did he not say 'for the sake of justice' 'for the sake of justice'? Did he not kill Vali because he stayed with his brother's wife?.... Now, Sugriva is staying with his brother's wife, isn't he? Why *doesn't* Rama *make even the slightest of noise*? Why doesn't he *beat* Sugriva *to death* saying, 'you violated justice!" Moreover, he praises Sugriva, 'you are a man of justice! You are a man of piety'!"

"Somebody is coming. Stop talking for a while."

"He is none else. It seems he is our 'Sumukha'

"Not *Sumukha* (good faced). His is a *Durmukha* (bad face). Ugly fellow. We should not trust him. He carries every thing both real and unreal to the ministers. He is Sugriva's man!"

"Now it is no use whatever we think. The king's order is Yama's order. It is better to go to battle instead of dying here. If we are lucky we may survive…."[285]

"All right! Let it be! What can we do? Can we avoid it?"

"This is for the establishment of justice, you know…."

"Ah yes, for Rama and me….justice?" ★

[Translation: **B.R. Bapuji**]

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[285] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 37, sloka 19:**
See the actual secret in Vanaras going to do Rama's work. "Hearing the command of king Sugriva who was equal to death, Vanaras turned up out of great fear." ★

Link-6

Between the 8th Story and the 9th Story

[The **8th** story ended with Sugriva's preparations for the battle. The **9th** story begins with Hanuman going to Lanka and meeting Sita. This link connects the two stories. In this link, we see largely 'myths'. Amidst these myths, we find a 'primitive way of life' consisting of many aspects such as protecting fruit trees from the enemies, living in the groves and bushes, delivering the children in caves, using articles like shields of animal skins and clubs.]

The order of Sugriva is nothing but the order of Yama (*the god of death*). The Vanara soldiers who set out from Kishkindha went around the whole kingdom and mobilized the Vanaras.

In the past when Rudra conducted a sacrifice in the Himalayas, ghee and articles of worship fell on the ground and plants and creepers grew in that region. The fruits - both ripe and unripe - which those plants bear were such that if anybody ate them, they didn't feel hungry for a month. (*Only one month? It would be nice if it were some ten thousand years!*) Such fruits and flowers, Vanaras brought and gave to Sugriva. (*Why does the king want such fruits? He needs fruits that will make him feel hungry fifty times a day*). Afraid of the king's order, all the Vanaras living in unknown, the remotest of places arrived in crores. Tara's father Sushena brought crores of people. Ruma's father, Tarudu, brought a thousand crores of people and Hanuman's father Kesari brought thousands of crores of people. Thousands of Vanara heroes like Satavali, Gavaksha, Nila, Nala, Darimukha, Dadhimukha, Durmukha, Jambavan, Gandhamadanu, Rambhu, Dhumru, Vanasu, Maindu, Dwividhu, Angada, Indrajanuvu, and Vahni mobilized crores of Vanaras.

After all the people had come, Sugriva said to Rama with deference, "Rama! All my people are ready to serve you. All this is your army. I hand it over to you. Command!"

Hugging Sugriva, Rama said serenely, "We have to find out whether Sita is, in fact, alive or not. We have to also find out where Ravana's residence is. After finding out these things, we can think of what to do next. You command your army. You know every thing. You are a great wise man. You are my lord and friend. You wish for my good. You know everything about the army and the treasury. Assess what my task is and do it accordingly." Rama nodded his head and then was silent.[286]

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286. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 40, slokas 10 to 15:

After the arrival of all the Vanaras, Sugriva to Rama: "The best among men! All this is your army. It is under your control. All are ready to be under your control, interested to do good for you and act as per your will. I know well the task of these troops. Yet, you have to command." Thus Sugriva put his army, State and power under the control of Rama and was ready to obey the command of Rama. *(Thus it is the poet's opinion that Sugriva must always be subservient to Rama.)*

After Sugriva said so, Rama says, "We have to find out whether Sita is alive or not. We have to locate the country where Ravana lives." He thus told him very clearly whatever he →

Immediately Sugriva called a commander named Vinata and ordered him, "You take with you a lakh Vanaras and go toward the East side." He gave details as to how to go about doing this. Sugriva knows what is what on the globe. "I will tell you everything about that path, listen! All of you should carefully search for Sita and Ravana. (*Both of them will be found at the same place.*) Throughout the path search the mountains, forests, villages, towns, rivers and lakes. *(Searching rivers and lakes for Sita!)* If you go a little farther you will find the Mandara mountain. People who live on it don't have ears. Some have lips as their hands. Some have only one leg. After searching there, you will come across Kirata Island. There people always live in the water. Search well in those rivers. *(Well, is it for Sita or fish?)* There, some people appear half in the form of humans and half in the form of tigers. Search all their houses and premises! Next, search the silver and gold mines! Search the Sisira mountain and the Shona river! Sita and Ravana may be found somewhere in the thick bushes or caves! Search very carefully! (*Rama might have given up his ghost by now, first search for it!*) Next search the islands in the ocean. There, you will find horrifying Rakshasas. If they see any one, they drag people catching their shadows. As a result those beings are under the control of Rakshasas. Search all over there! *(If Rakshasas drag the shadows of those who are searching?)* Then, search in the Red sea. In that sea, rice, sacred grass, flowers etc - which Brahmins offer along with water to the gods or to venerable men - hit the Rakshasas. And the Rakshasas fall in the sea and rise after some time. *(So, water oblations of Brahmins have the capacity to fell Rakshasas for a while!)*

→ wanted to be carried out. Further, he says, "Thereafter, I will work with you depending on the time." *(This means, he is saying, I will consult you what to do later once we know about Sita and Ravana'. It follows, it is Rama alone who will decide everything.)*

He has told so clearly, hasn't he? Again, he says, "Lakshmana and I are not masters of this task. (*Of course, Lakshmana is not, any way!*) You know the nature of my task. You order them. It is you who have to complete the task. You are the lord. You are capable. You are interested in doing me good. You have already done good things. You know economics." This is how Rama eulogized him.

Rama did not command the Vanara army on his own. This means, he is not directly exercising hegemony over the Kishkindha kingdom. The Imperial heads do not directly exercise their hegemony over subsidiary kingdoms. They *hold* the subsidiary kings *in their fist* and exercise hegemony through them indirectly.

"We have to search for Sita!" is Rama's order. But he won't call the Vanara army and tell them, "You search for Sita!" If he does so, it will become clear to all that Rama himself is ruling the Kishkindha kingdom. Then, the Vanara army will not like to be under the authority of a foreign king. 'We have to wage a battle against Ravana' is also Rama's order. But, its implementation will take place in the form of Sugriva's order.

If Kishkindha is not under the control of Rama, people there would have only Sugriva's domination over them. They need not sacrifice their comforts and lives by participating in battles for the sake of Imperial heads. Their hardships will be limited.

Rama converted Kishkindha which was an independent kingdom under Vali - into his indirect subsidiary. If Kishkindha has to become an independent kingdom again, people of Kishkindha have to wage a battle against Rama (Ayodhya's army and win).

We can compare a 'subsidiary' kingdom of the past times with a colony in a sense - although there are many differences between the two conditions economically and politically. The interests of Emperors keeping subsidiaries under their control and the Imperialists forming colonies are the same. ★

Then you will come across the Rishyamuka mountain in the sea of milk. (*Kshira sagara*). Over that mountain, there is a lake. Search all over there. Thereafter, there is an ocean called Jalodam. In that ocean, animals cry looking at the fire in the water. Search in the mountains inside that ocean. If you cross that, you will come across the Golden Mountain. On that mountain, you will find a thousand-headed *Adiseshu* carrying the earth. *(That gentleman carries earth and earth him!)* That gentleman wears blue garments. *(Is it a uniform?)* Thereafter, you will find Udaya mountain. It is a lump of gold. All over that mountain, there are palm trees, Gogu trees and Maddi trees and all of them are of gold. (*Oh! All the fruits are gold fruits?*) When Lord Vishnu suppressed Emperor Bali, he kept one foot on Udayagiri and another foot on the Meru mountain. Search those mountains. That Udayagiri is the first gate for the sun to enter the world. Then don't go beyond it! There gods move about. Utter darkness. Go up to Udayagiri and return within one month! I will get all those who do not return killed. Death sentences. Go full of enthusiasm and joy! This is my order! This is Rama's task!

Vinata at once took the army and went away. (*Yes, why delay? They had to search in so many places! If he can save even a minute, it will be a good saving*!)

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The important persons among others whom Sugriva ordered toward the south were Angada, Tarudu, Hanuman, Sushena, Nila, and Jambavan. Sugriva gave all the details about the south as well.

(*When Sugriva saw all these directions, Hanuman, Tarudu and Nila were accompanying him.*) "Go searching all the forests, hills, rivers, oceans, forests in oceans, oceans in forests and everything. At one place you will come across the Vindhya Mountain. Next the Narmada river, the Godavari river, and the Krishna river. Search all of them![287] Thereafter see Andhradesa and Kerala desa.

You will find sandal wood forest on Sahya mountain. Search each and every tree! (*May be Sita ought to have climbed a trees!*) Heavenly nymphs saunter about in the Kaveri river area. Check all that area. On the Malaya mountain, sage Agasthya shines like the sun. (*He shines like that, but he is not the sun*). Have his *darshan* (sight). (*Don't embarrass him by asking him about the whereabouts of Sita. He won't be able to tell you.*) If you cross Pandya city, you will find the Mahendra mountain. The whole of it is a lump of gold. Agasthya kept that mountain in the ocean. There, gods always saunter about. On important days, Indra too comes there. If you go still farther, you will see an island in the middle of the ocean. That is Ravana's place of residence. He is the king of the Rakshasas.[288]

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[287] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 42, slokas 12 & 13:** It was the poet who wrote these names. "You have to search for Sita in Godavari area in Dandakaranya and similarly in Andhra, Pundra, Chola, Pandya and Kerala countries." ★

[288] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 41, slokas 24 & 26:** All this clamour is because they don't know so far where Ravana is, do they? Sugriva is sending his men to 'find out where Ravana is', isn't he? But now, he is telling us about the whereabouts of Ravana! "In the (southern) sea, there is an island which is hundred *yojanas* wide and which is not possible for humans to enter. That is where Ravana lives - a wicked fellow, a sinner, one who has the aura akin to that of Indra and one who is fit to be killed."

If Sugriva knew so clearly where Ravana was, why should he send Vanaras in all directions? See what the same Sugriva said at the beginning when he made friendship with Rama.

In **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 7, sloka 2:** "I do not know the place of residence, capacity, valour and caste of that man, who was born in a wicked family and is a sinner."

Now, even atter Sugriva told Rama about, Rama did not ask him, "Then why have you said all these days that you did not know Ravana's whereabouts." ★

Search the whole island carefully! In the southern sea there is a female Rakshasa called Angaraka. She catches the shadows of living beings and drags them. Search that entire area. There is a mountain called Pushpitam far away from the island Lanka. Above its peaks the sun saunters on one peak and the moon on the other. But that mountain isn't visible to ungrateful people, sinners and atheists. *(How lucky!)*

Search those peaks if Sita appears. There is another mountain called Kunjara. On the top of it, Viswakarma constructed a house for sage Agasthya. *(Perhaps, sage Agasthya moves from the Malaya mountain to the Kunjara mountain after this house was ready!)* Gems are found in huge heaps. (*Oh, this is the reason for moving!*) There is a town called Bhogavati. It is a place for all snakes. King of snakes, Vasuki lives there. Search there also for Sita and Ravana! *(Why search in all the directions, once Ravana's place of residence is known!)*

Next, you will come across Rishabha mountain. There too, gems are in huge heaps. *(Only gems or bags as well? How can one bring those gems if there were no bags?)* All over that mountain, there are fruit bearing trees and sandal wood trees. You should not touch them, you see! Gandharvas keep a watch over them. *(Why trees, touch Gandharvas!)* Those who have done pious acts assume the forms of the sun and the moon and live on that mountain. *(All of you also will die in the battle and go there, so choose your places!)* Don't go beyond that point! Beyond it, it is the world of ancestors. The kingdom of Yama. Utter darkness. A big ditch. You will fall into it.... whoever returns within a month and reports that they have seen Sita, can make any number of mistakes. - All of you are great warriors! Born in good families! Rich in tradition! Somehow or the other, locate Sita and Ravana."

Later, Sugriva asked Sushena, the father of Tara to take two lakh Vanaras and go towards the west. *(Poet, sir! You had already sent Susena towards the South, hadn't you?)* Sugriva began to narrate all the details of the west. "Search Sowrashtra and Balilika. There search everything: rivers, forests, hills, lakes and hermitages of sages! *(Should they search hermitages of sages for the sake of Sita? Yeah, how can we believe sages too?)* Search if they are in deserts or holes in the earth *(Is it for Sita or rats?)*, mountains and caves. There is a mountain called Hemagiri where the Sindhu river joins the sea. There are lions with wings. They build nests on the trees. They kidnap sharks and elephants and keep in their nests. *(Sita will surely be found in these nests. She is very fond of lions. Moreover they are lions with wings! So, why will she come to Rama?)* One of the peaks of Hemagiri is a lump of gold. *(It is the good luck of that peak!)* Next, if you go a little farther, you will find the Pariyatra mountain in the western ocean. All of it is also a lump of gold. *(So gold means 'stone' perhaps! Because one has to treat both earth and gold alike, the poet-sir, as he cannot afford to treat gold as earth, is treating earth and stones as gold.)* There are twenty four crores of Gandharvas on that golden mountain. Don't touch those fruits, bulbs and fruits! Gandharvas will wage a war. There is a mountain called Vajra. It is full of gems. *(At every moment, we find the agony of the poet that he could not have a gem-studded string round his waist.* In the western sea itself there is a hill called Chakravanta. There *Sri Mahavishnu*, with great valour, killed a Rakshasa called Hayagriva and acquired his wheel weapon and killed another Rakshasa called Panchajana and acquired a conch called Panchajanya.[289]

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289. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 42, slokas 27 & 28: "There is a hill called Chakravanta in the salt sea....In that Chakravanta, Vishnu killed a Rakshasa called Hayagriva who used to protect the wheel and acquired it. He also killed a Rakshasa called Panchajana and acquired his conch called Panchajana." - These two weapons belonged to others. Vishnu acquired them. 'Valour' means strength of taking anything from others by force. (Weapons, women or kingdoms) that belong to 'others'. It is a matter of great fame if one takes things like that. Great men and gods are those people who always harass others and grab all the belongings of others! ★

Search every inch if Sita and Ravana are seen in any bushes in that area.

There is another mountain called Viraha. There Narakasura lives. If you go still farther, you will find hundreds of mountains with caves. Those caves are full of gold. If you go still farther, you will find sixty thousand mountains. All are lumps of gold. Amidst those mountains there is the Meru mountain. On the Meru mountain, there is a great ascetic called Meru Savarni. Worship him and ask about Sita. *(That will be futile, he can't tell you anything!)* The sun crosses the Meru mountain and goes to Astagiri. Viswakarma built a great house consisting of many mansions. The sun stays daily in that house.

Beyond Astagiri every thing is dark. You can't go farther. Come back within a month. I will get all those who don't return killed." Narrating all this Sugriva respectfully saluted Tara's father. That gentleman left before his son-in-law finished greeting him.

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Then Sugriva asked Satavali to go towards North. "Go to the North along with one lakh people! Sri Rama is a valorous man who can conquer the enemy towns. Such a Sri Rama has mercy on us. He has given us a lot of help. *(Throne to me, gallows to you! Our lives will be fulfilled if we help Rama reciprocally.)* So, all of you must accomplish the task very carefully. Search all the countries: Mlecha, Pulinda, Prajkala, Arattaka, Tankana, Darada *(Is there a country called 'Durada' (Itching) also? Don't go there! You will die scratching yourselves!)*, China and Parama China. *(If it were today, it would be no use search 'People's China'. There, you won't find devoted wives like Sita!)* Ravana 'might' be with Sita in Loddugu and Devadaru forests. *(How many times 'might' Rama have fainted?)* Next, you will come across the Soma hermitage, the Kasi mountain and the Sudersana mountain. Everything is gold. Search each and every corner! Next, you will find a mountain called Devasakha. It is full of trees. The trees are full of birds. If you go still farther you will see the Kailasa mountain. Kubera will be there also. Search his entire forest. Next will be the Krowncha mountain. Inside it, there is a big cave. In that cave, there are *very* great sages. *(Perhaps in the form of bats!)* Search that cave of sages. Even gods cannot reach that place. Search all that! After crossing Mainaka mountain, you will find Siddhasramam. There are *very* great sages here. *(Well, which sages are greater? Tell us exactly sages there or sages here?)* Due to penance, they have lost all the mental impurities *(also minds?)*

You will find golden lotuses in the Vaikhasana lake *(Don't sit seeing them!)* There is an elephant called Sarvabhowma, sauntering along with many of its loves. *(The poet is not satisfied unless he kept many loves even for an elephant.)* If you go beyond that lake, you will not find the sun and the moon. No stars. No light. No clouds. No noise. There you will find some very great sages shining with great brightness. That place glows with that light. There, you have a river called the Sailoda. There are bamboos on its banks. They lean from one bank to another. Sages cross the Sailoda river across those bamboos. *(Why, can't they cross with their brightness? Do they need bamboos to cross a river?)* Next, in the rivers of north Kuru lands, the golden lotuses have diamond petals. In those rivers, instead of sand, you find pearls, gems, rubies and other precious stones. The trees there fulfil all one's wishes. Some trees grow silk garments, with golden lace. Some trees grow gem-ornaments suitable for men and women. Some trees grow gold cots with beautiful decoration, mattresses, pillows, blankets and with very comfortable and strange arrangements. *(How nice it would be if we get the seeds of these trees!)* Some trees grow beautiful women. *(Don't they grow men? Who wants such trees that are partial women?)* Search carefully that whole place where these trees are. *(If it is this sort of search, Sita will never be found!)* If you cross the north Kuru land, you will find the north Salt Sea. In the centre of that sea, there is a gold mountain called Somagiri on which Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra live. It is not possible for any one to go there.

Search there for Sita! Do not go further!....All of you are great warriors! Loyal! If you accomplish Rama's task, you will receive my grace and immerse in all kinds of pleasures. *(Otherwise, you will hang at gallows. It is up to you!)*

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[Though people who were asked to go in various directions left, those who were expected to go south had not moved. Why?]

Sugriva said to Hanuman with special attention, "You are a hero of all the heroes. You can travel in all ways: roadways, waterways and wind ways. You know all the worlds of gods. You are a man of great lustre! You alone can accomplish the task of locating Sita."

As Sugriva spoke to Hanuman with such special admiration and expressed such great confidence, Rama realized that it was only Hanuman who could accomplish his task. *(Then why the hell did he harass and trouble so many lakhs of people sending them every which way? It would have been nice if all the Vanaras had kicked Rama and Sugriva!)*

Rama gave Hanuman a ring on which his name was carved. (*Where did he get this? Can sages have rings? How many more things did he bring stealthily?*) "Hanuman! If you show this ring to her, Sita will believe you. She will realize that you have come from me. You are a great hero. Sugriva has any way given you a harsh order. *(You will get the work done at least due to that fear.)* It seems the task will be accomplished."

Hanuman took the ring and started off for Lanka.

After all the Vanaras had gone in the four directions, Rama asked Sugriva, "Sugriva! When did you see the entire globe?" *(But he had not asked him, "Why did you say that you don't know Ravana's whereabouts?")*

Sugriva narrated the same old story again. Vali being held up in the cave, Sugriva's coronation *(making Tara too his wife! Sugriva lived with his brother's wife earlier than Vali lived with Sugriva's wife)*, the coming out of Vali from the cave and banishing Sugriva.... Sugriva recalled every thing and said, "My ministers and I ran in all the four directions. Vali was chasing us. Only then, did we see the entire globe. After exhausting all the four directions, Hanuman remembered that Vali does not come to Rishyamuka near Kishkindha. *(Oh, what a forgetfulness of Hanuman! Does he remember the hill in his own village after roaming the entire earth! We don't know where he will lose that ring!)* You know what happened after that." Thus Sugriva told him the basis of his knowledge of geography. Rama felt happy.

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Well, except those who went towards the South, people who went in other directions returned within a month. They said, "We did not find Sita". Moreover they said, "Hanuman is a great man! Since Hanuman has gone in the same direction in which Ravana went, that great man will locate that great woman. There is no doubt about it." *(So, these fellows might not have searched at all. They must have sat under some trees, eaten fruits heartily and returned. How shrewd they are!)*

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About those who went towards the South. They went on their way searching every thing. They came across the hermitage of sage Kandu. The trees in the forest surrounding his hermitage had turned into stumps. Not only fruits and flowers but even the leaves were absent. In that area, there was not even an animal or a bird. The reason was that the son of sage Kandu had died suddenly, so the sage had got angry on all and cursed that all creatures must perish. He was such a noble man. They had not found Sita in that area. They searched and searched and were tired. They had not found anything to eat or drink. *(Then, what does the sage eat?)*

After searching a lot, they saw a big cave at one spot. Its name was Ruksha. It was covered with bushes and trees. Many kinds of fragrance came out of that cave. Birds came with wet wings. All people rushed into the cave. There was utter darkness for some distance inside.

After that, they saw gold trees. Around their base, there were platforms made of diamonds and precious stones. There were many mansions there. Some were made of gold, some of silver. (*Are they of silver? Poet, sir! Do you say this because people may not believe you if you say that all are of gold? Doesn't matter. Anyway, they are built with your 'iron pen', aren't they? So, build all of them with gold!*)

There all the lakes were of gold. In those lakes, golden black bees sat in the lotuses and were drinking golden honey. In that cave, there were golden beds studded with gems and diamonds. There were golden seats. All kinds of things that you find in the world were present there. All were made of gold. There were many eatables, drinks, intoxicants in gold plates. At a distance, there was a woman-ascetic.

"Who are you?" Hanuman asked her. (*If Hanuman comes to our house, he will ask us, "Who are you?" He will not say who he is and why he has come!*)

She said, "There was a Rakshasa called Maya. He did penance and got the entire *Sukra vastu sastra* (Sukra's science of house building) as a boon from Brahma. That Maya built mansions and lakes in this cave. This man loved a celestial nymph called Hema. Indra came to know about it, killed Maya and gave away all his property to Hema. She is a dear friend of mine. She has handed over this cave to me to guard. I am the daughter of Meru Savarni. My name is Swayamprabha. You are very tired. Eat well, drink and be comfortable." *(So, women remain good even if they do penance. If it were Viswamitra, he would have cursed, "Why the hell have you come to my cave? All of you turn into Lizards.")* All the Vanaras happily ate and drank every thing. They relaxed there for some days.

Swayamprabha asked the Vanaras, "What is your mission?" Hanuman began to narrate every thing. "There is a king called Rama. *(He is considering Rama as a king, not as a sage!)* He is fit to rule all the worlds. *(Except their kingdom!)* Thus he narrated the entire *Ramayana*! Finally he said, "We have to search for Sita. The deadline is over. Get us out of this cave." Swayamprabha said, "Close your eyes!" All Vanaras closed their eyes. (*If they keep their eyes open, their eyes reel while they fly!*)

All of them came and stood on the bank of the sea near Vindhya. All the trees of the surrounding mountains blossomed a lot. They realized that it was a spring *(How many times does spring come in a year?)* Deadline to return to Kishkindha was over. Every body sat under a flower tree and began to discuss.

Angada proposed not to return to Kishkindha at all. "We started in the month of Asvayuja. *(Rama said rainy season is up to Kartika. Some time has passed after that. This means, it is neither Asvayuja nor Kartika that the Vanaras started.)* Our task is not accomplished. Deadline is over. If we return now, the king will kill us. In fact, Sugriva has a grudge against me. He did not offer me the position of the prince willingly. He made me prince because Rama asked him to do so. He will try to get me killed because of this offence. Why should my friends grieve over my death at Kishkindha? So, it is better if I fast unto death."

Except Hanuman, all people said, "Yes. Sugriva has been a wicked fellow right from the beginning. Death is inevitable if we go to Kishkindha."

Recalling his son-in-law's cruelty, Tarudu was also frightened. He said, "Let us remain in Swayamprabha's cave. Not only Rama, even Indra cannot do anything." *(Well said grand pa Tarudu!)*

All Vanaras agreed happily. "Yes. Let us do that. We will stay there."

None of these arguments convinced Hanuman. Hanuman grasped that Angada was trying to create a sense of enmity among all Vanaras against Sugriva and turn them to his side. He thought of not allowing such a thing to happen. Angada was a great warrior like his father. He had mental strength. He had the best qualities. He had read the scriptures. Like a full moon he had strength and valour. It was not safe for Sugriva to have such a person as his enemy. Hanuman thought out and tried to make Angada in favour of Sugriva. First, he thought of creating dissensions between Angada and all the other soldiers and then scolding Angada. He began as if he was preaching him with great affection. "Angada! Prince! You are under the illusion that all these Vanaras will abide by your word. They won't do so for long. (*They will happily abide by it. Because they too fear for their life to go to Kishkindha!*) This Jambavan, Nila, Suhotra - all these people will not follow your advice. Not only they. Even I too won't. Nobody can take me away from Sugriva. *(Not from Sugriva, from the ministership!)* The stronger can have enmity with the weaker. This is politics *(What a nice politics!)* But, the weaker must not have enmity with the stronger. You should be subservient to Sugriva for your own safety. May be you are thinking that no danger will befall you if you remain in Swayamprabha's cave. To tear that cave like a leafy dune by shooting only one arrow, why Rama.... Lakshmana is enough...Heed my advice and change your opinion about remaining here...Sugriva is not so harsh as you think. He will never have you killed. He has lot of infatuation for your mother. Other than you, he does not have any sons, does he? If you are loyal to the commands of Sugriva, he will give the kingdom to you after he became old. Your younger-father is a man of justice. Noble. Kind. *(Hanuman knows pretty well that he won't get the death penalty.)* If you don't heed my advice and still remain here, then death will be inevitable for you. Don't think Sugriva will let you live." Hanuman threatened Angada to the best of his ability.

Angada had not heeded any of Hanuman's words. "Sugriva does not have a single good quality as you praised him. He has no justice. He has no heart. No sincerity. No repentance. No mercy. No valour. No courage. Can a man who has killed his brother be noble? Will a man - who has compelled his sister-in-law who was like a mother - when his elder brother was still alive in the cave - be noble? (*It is the poet who used the expression 'like his mother'*). Sugriva made arrangements to search for Sita not because he wants to abide by his promise but because he afraid of Rama. Who will believe such a wicked man? He will not give me the kingdom ever. He will give it to the son whom he will beget. If I go to Kishkindha now, he will hear from some one that I had abused him and had me killed secretly even without the knowledge of my mother. I will not come there. None need to stay with me. Let all people go away. My mother is very kind. I am like *five lives* to her. Console her." Said Angada, saluted all the elders and lay down, crying. All the Vanaras surrounded him, abused Sugriva and praised Vali, shedding tears. "Let all of us die here", they said determined. *(One should have seen Hanuman's face then!)*[290]

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290. Kishkindha kanda, sarga 53, from sloka 27 till the end. Also sargas 54 and 55 wholly: See the kind of opinion Angada has about his younger father. "Sugriva is a cruel man by birth. Sugriva - who had utter hatred and who wished to punish me - will impose a severe punishment on me. Instead of falling into his hands and being tortured, it is better to give up my ghost here."

Just as he had anger for Sugriva, Angada should have had anger for Rama as well, shouldn't he? He should have had more anger. But, the poet made Angada abuse Sugriva but did not make him utter a single word against Rama. Moreover, he made him praise Rama. Angada praised Rama, "Sugriva did not at all crown me prince. Sri Rama - who has pure behaviour and who is the best among human beings - himself crowned me."

Seeing Angada who spoke thus, "Hanuman realized that Angada had the ability to rule the kingdom." Having realized this, what did Hanuman do? "Of the four tactics [*speaking gently(sama), giving money or charity(dana), creating dissensions (bheda) and threatening with punishment or force(danda)*], used the tactic of creating dissensions and created dissension among the Vanaras. While Vanaras were differing with each other, Hanuman created fear in Angada by speaking many terrifying words of the tactic of punishment."

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All Vanaras were crying and recollecting all the things that may cause their death.

Meanwhile, Sampati - a big bird without wings - came walking from the hills. Seeing the Vanaras, he felt happy, "Ah! How much food I have! I will eat them happily!"

Sampati had heard about Jatayu while the Vanaras were talking among themselves. Then he asked, "Vanaras! Jatayu was my younger brother. You are saying that Ravana killed him. Tell me all that to me in detail. For a long time, I have had no news about where my brother is. My wings burnt down due to the heat of the sun. Help me climb down from this hill."

Angada helped him down and he began to narrate the entire story. "The dead line for the search for Sita is over. So, we are thinking of dying here. Do you know any thing about where Ravana lives?" *(Already, Sugriva had said it, didn't he? Again somebody had to say where Ravana was? It seems the minds of these fellows had gone mad due to the weight of Rama's task!)*

Hearing the entire story, Sampati said, "I have seen Ravana abducting Sita. Sita was crying and throwing her ornaments. Ravana is the younger brother of Kubera. He lives in Lanka. Lanka is hundred *yojanas* away from here. Look over there, I am able to see Sita from here itself. Crows and falcons cannot see such a long distance but birds of our species can see up to hundred *yojanas*. *(Then why didn't you see your brother, my lad?)* If you kill Ravana, my grudge against Ravana will also be satisfied. In fact, I would have done Rama's task myself but I have become old. Now I cannot do anything. Take me to the sea. I will offer water oblation etcetera to my brother."

The Vanaras carried Sampati near the sea and brought him back after the business of the offerings was over.

Jambavan went to Sampati and asked, "Oh, king of the birds! Where is Sita? Who stole her? Save us by telling us all that information." *(Pity,*

→ The words of Hanuman: "If you antagonize Sugriva and remain in the cave, all the Vanaras will leave you. You will become *like grass* without friends and well wishers. If you enter Kishkindha with humility, Sugriva will gradually establish you in the kingdom."

It was always very dangerous to Sugriva if Angada had remained there with some army and lived separately with a sense of hostility towards Sugriva, wasn't it? It was better to make Angada by means of persuasion or threats in favour of Sugriva. This was something that would do good for Sugriva and Rama. Therefore, the poet glorifies the threat to and criticism of Angada by Hanuman as a great thing and that Hanuman was a noble and well mannered man.

Angada's reply to Hanuman's reprimand: "Sugriva does not have a stable mind, purity of soul, mercy, honesty, valour and serenity. One who took his elder brother's wife, who was like his mother, as his wife, when his brother was still alive is condemned by the world. How can a man be just who closed the entrance of the cave when his brother had entered the cave? Sugriva - who did unpleasant things secretly, who was harsh and who was base - will imprison me and punish me, out of his avarice for the kingdom - thus Angada wailed."

A question may arise. 'The poet is siding Sugriva, isn't he? Why, then, did he make Angada abuse Sugriva? Why did he expose Sugriva's bad qualities? This is the question. This poet uses whatever argument that serves him in a given context. Some of the wrongs of Sugriva are clearly seen. Therefore, the poet is very eager to make a character ask this. There is nothing unpleasant for him in reprimanding that character. But he never made any character abuse Rama any where - as he made Angada abuse Sugriva. He has not criticized Rama's behaviour anywhere.

Well, after Angada thus lay down weeping, "All Vanaras looked at Angada and wept, abused Sugriva, praised Vali, surrounded Angada and were ready to fast unto death." Vanaras had anger on Sugriva but not on Rama. On the other hand, they had devotion for him! They eulogized Rama's qualities.

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this gentleman has lost his mind fully. He is asking about who carried away Sita! Yeah, people talk like this when they are in the midst of life and death!)[291]

Sampati: "I will tell you how I came to know about Sita and from whom I heard about it. Listen! *(A while ago, he said that he had himself seen her, didn't he?)* Since my wings had got burnt, I have been staying on the mountain for a long time. My son gets me food. One day he came without food. When I asked him the reason, he narrated the whole thing. 'Father! While going in search of animals I stood upside down over the sea. Meanwhile, a man carrying a woman asked me to 'give way'. I gave way. After that, Siddhas told me that Ravana was abducting Sita and Sita was crying. As that happened, I could not get food for you'. Although I was very angry at Ravana, I could not do anything as I did not have wings. *(I could have shown valour!)*

I will also tell you how I lost my wings, listen! *(All right, carry on! Can we avoid listening to you?)* In the past, Jatayu and I took a bet and we started towards the sun. After we went some distance, my brother, unable to withstand the heat, lost consciousness. Immediately, I covered my brother with my wings. Due to the heat, my wings got burnt and I fell down on the Vindhya mountain. After I regained consciousness, I went to the hermitage of sage Nisakara, crawling slowly. By the time I reached there, the sage was returning from the forest. Big tigers, lions, elephants and great snakes followed him up to his hermitage, bid him farewell with respect and returned. *(This gentleman could qualify for a circus job.)* When I narrated the entire episode of the burning of my wings, wailing, that sage consoled me. "I can give you wings right away. But I will not. Because I have heard in puranic stories that a great event will take place. I understood it to be true through my penance. After some thousands of years, a son called Rama will be born to king Dasaratha. (*What would have happened, if Rama's name was 'Subba'? Perhaps, the sages might be saying that 'a son named Subba will be born to king Dasaratha'. The name Rama was fixed before Rama was born!*) That Rama will come to the forests. Ravana abducts Sita. Sita will not even touch food out of agony of separation from her husband. Indra will send her rice cooked in milk and sugar. (*Some tactic!*) Sita accepts it. Out of that rice, she will take out some part and say, "This is for my husband. This should go to him whether he is alive or dead. And she will eat the remaining. *(This means, she offers it to her husband just as it is offered to a dead person!)*[292]

Vanaras will come in this direction searching for Sita. You have to tell the Vanaras that Sita is in Lanka. Till then I will not give you wings. *(I can't believe you!)* You will get back your wings as soon as you tell him the news of Sita to Vanaras. Now, I will go to heaven. Though I am curious to see Sri Rama, I cannot wait" (*Who will wait until then?*) Thus that sage went to heaven. This happened a hundred years ago. (*Once he says some thousands of years, another time hundred years! What can we do?*) I have been living in grief without wings. With a hope that I will get my wings back, I spend time waiting for you." (*Then why did you say that you would*

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[291] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 59, up to 5 slokas:** Sampati's reporting - that Sita is in Lanka and he was able to see her - was over. Yet Jambavan asked, "Where is Sita? Who abducted her?" ★

[292] **Kishkindha kanda, sarga 62, slokas 7 & 10:** This is what sage Nisakara told Sampati. Sampati is reporting it to the Vanaras. "Drowned in grief, the devoted wife Sita will not eat. Having come to know about her not-eating the food, Indra sends her holy food. Having come to know that Indra has sent that food which even gods cannot secure, Sita receives it, allots the first part to Sri Rama, puts it on the floor and says, "Let this rice satisfy my lord and husband whether he is alive with Lakshmana or has attained godliness." ★

kill them as soon as you saw Vanaras? You were aware of Rama's story, weren't you? Then why did you ask as if you were not aware?) - While Sampati was talking to them, he got beautiful red wings. He got back the strength of his youth. Overwhelmed with joy, Sampati flew away saying, "You take care of the business of killing Ravana!" (*Disregarding Rama's task! This is why, that sage had said that he wouldn't give him wings!*)

After Sampati flew away, all the Vanaras reached the sea. Now they had to go to Lanka crossing the sea! Sampati had said that Sita was in Lanka, hadn't he?

Angada asked, "Who can cross the sea? Who can cross how much distance?"

Each one of them told him about their strength and abilities.

Sushena said he could jump to a length of eight *yojanas*.

"In the past, when Vishnumurti had assumed the form of Trivikrama, suppressed Bali into the earth and occupied all the worlds, I circumambulated him for a thousand times. *(We can't believe this man's words. He had heard about Sita, forgot it the next moment and asked about it again. How can he remember the past events?)* Now, I can cross ninety *yojanas*."

Angada said, "I can cross hundred *yojanas* but don't know whether I can return." *(Make friends with Ravana, come in an airplane and invade Sugriva!)*

Jambavan said to Angada, "You can cross not a hundred but a thousand *yojanas*. You must not cross at all. You are our lord. The army must protect its lord. I will think about the hero who will go to Lanka." And he went to Hanuman.

Hanuman went afar and sat alone. *(Perhaps to evade work!)*

Jambavan went to Hanuman and began to eulogize him, "Hanuman! You alone are the great hero among us. You have strength equivalent to that of Garutmanta." (*As soon as he saw Jambavan, Hanuman might have frowned, "Oh, no! I can't go, you see!" The proof for this is that he sat at a distance when such an important business was going on.*) "My lad! Your mother Anjana was a celestial nymph in her past birth. Your father Kesari was a noble person (*Was he noble in his past birth?*) Once when your mother assumed a human form, adorned herself beautifully and was sauntering about on the mountain, Vayudeva *(god of wind)* sexually aroused, removed her garments and hugged her. Your mother who was a great devoted wife, got angry and asked, "Who is this man breaking my devotion to my husband?" Then the god of wind said, "I will not torture you. I have passionate desire for you in my mind. You will beget a son who will be a great hero like me. He will be able to jump any length and cross any length." Later your mother delivered you in the Cave of Mandara Mountain. Thus, you are *kshetraja putra* of Kesari and *Aurasa putra* of Vayudeva.

As soon as you were born, you thought the sun was a fruit and flew over into the sky. You went up three hundred *yojanas*. Indra got angry and hit you with his diamond weapon. *(If that man hit a child with his diamond weapon, he was not Indra but a ruffian!)* You fell down with that blow. Your cheek broke. Your father got angry and stopped blowing wind around. *(It means he went on strike!)* All the three worlds were upset. Brahma and Indra came and gave you boons. Weapons will not hurt you. You will die only if you wish. Your father felt happy about those boons and began to blow the wind as before. Therefore, your capacity to move about is infinite. You, yourself, have to cross the sea and search for Sita."

Hanuman (*swelled with pride*) began to expand his body, knowing his strength. He increased and increased and began the flow of his talk. "I am a great hero. I am the son of Vayu. I can take away this globe and sink it in the sea. (*So, this is what a strong man does!*) While flying, I can make the sea follow me as swiftly as I fly. I can start with the sun, but can reach Astagiri before him and can return and cross the sun much before he reaches half way. I can bring Lanka here along with Sita." Hanuman felt flattered.

So flattered and flattered, he climbed Mahendra hill. As he climbed, that mountain got pressed into the ground like a soft wick and water gushed out from beneath the earth. All creatures were pressed in the mountain and cried terribly. The snakes raised their hilts with a hissing noise and stood like flags across the mountain.

Leaving their hermitages, toddy cottages, meat, toddy vessels, shields made of skin, swords with good hilts, clubs and flying into the sky along with their wives, sages and Gandharvas stood talking about the heroic deed of Hanuman.

Here ends '*Kishkindha kanda*'. Next begins '*Sundara kanda*'.

[Even at the beginning of 'Sundara kanda', we find the description of Mahendra mountain, Hanuman's expansion of his body and his flying.]

Expanding his body, Hanuman jumped once. Flying over the sea, he went like a blue cloud and a winged mountain.

The sea saw Hanuman and thought, "This man is going to fulfil Rama's task. I too should help the task of Rama. I have developed due to the sons of king Sagara of Raghu dynasty.

He called a mountain into the waters and hurried him. "Mainaka! Devendra kept you as a guard to prevent Rakshasas coming from the nether world. You can grow in any direction you want. Hanuman is crossing me while going to do Rama's task. As you are inside me, you have to help Hanuman. Increase in height. Look there! Hanuman is coming. He will relax on you and then carry on."

Mainaka agreed and shot up to the sky.

Seeing the mountain come in his way, Hanuman felt sorry that there would be a hurdle in his way. He pushed away the mountain with force.

Mainaka felt happy at his valour, assumed human form (*all miracles have to manifest in a human form!*) stood on the mountain and said, "Hanuman! I am not your enemy. The sea has asked me to help you. Relax on me for a while, eat fruits heartily and carry on, on your own way. - I will tell you my story. Listen! *(Stop there! What is this hurry?)* My name is Mainaka. In the past, mountains had wings. Then they used to fly swiftly *(like sparrows!)*. Sages and gods used to fear that mountains may fall on them. *(Bad character! They too fly, don't they?)* Indra got angry with the mountains and began to cut off their wings. He came near me to cut off my wings also but your father Vayudeva hid me in the sea. Since then I have been here. *(What has sea said a while ago? To prevent Rakshasas coming from the nether world....or some such thing? When he said so, this man kept quiet. Now...Oh! Whoever opens his mouth....lies!)* Since your father saved me, I will help you and clear my debt to him. *(Not for the sake of Rama's task! Why do I bother myself with it!)* Do take rest on me!" Mainaka asked.

Hanuman felt happy and said, "I had vowed that I wouldn't stop anywhere. *(Doesn't mind, stand for a while! Who is going to see you?)* Don't think otherwise. I am going on an urgent task. If I delay, it will get dark." He patted Mainaka with one hand and rushed on ahead.

All the gods in the sky praised Hanuman a lot.

Indra praised Mainaka and assured him,

"You have done a good job. Now, you can be free as you were before."

Hanuman rushed forward as if he dragged the sky at great speed.

Gods and sages wanted to have fun testing Hanuman. *(What work do they have? Only eating and roaming about, isn't it? They do only some such things!)* They called Surasa, the mother of Nagas and asked her, "Surasa! Assume the form of a terrible Rakshasa, go and stand Hanuman's way. Let us see what he will do?"

Surasa went with a frightening shape and said to Hanuman, "I will eat you!"

Hanuman saluted that frightening form and began his narration of the great deeds of king Dasaratha and leaping over Kaika's wickedness… Rama's exile in forest…. terrible hardships…. golden deer…. abduction of Sita… death of Jatayu, killing of Vali and finally said, "This is the matter. I have to search for Sita. All this is Rama's kingdom. You are also in Rama's kingdom. So, you too should be obedient to Rama. Let me go. Do you say 'no'…? *(Don't you believe Rama?)*….I will see Sita, give her news to Rama and come back. Then you can eat me. I swear. Let me go!" *(It is all a lie, Surasa! Don't believe him. He won't come back again. What about his ministership there? Eat him now!)* Surasa refused to believe Hanuman's swearing. "No, not possible. I have a boon. You should not go beyond me. Come, enter my mouth!" She opened her mouth. *(Boon that begs and calls someone into the mouth!)*

Hanuman expanded his body to a size larger than Surasa. Surasa expanded her mouth still larger. In that manner, Hanuman expanded to a width of hundred *yojanas*. *(The distance between Kishkindha and Lanka is hundred yojanas.)* Expanding like that, Hanuman suddenly turned into a thumb size and rushed into Surasa's mouth and came out. "Your boon is fulfilled. Now, I am going." He started.

Surasa assumed her original form and said, "Go, my lad! Accomplish Rama's task!"

All the gods felt happy.

Hanuman was going along a path in the sky.

It is a country where clouds shower water.

It is a world where Gandharvas roam about singing.

It is a place where a beautiful rainbow appears.

It is a place where gods saunter about on bird-vehicles and tiger-vehicles. It is a place of residence to all those great men who are in heaven.

Hanuman was going along such a path. A Rakshasa called Simhika felt happy on seeing Hanuman and caught his shadow. Hanuman could not move forward like a ship stopped due to head-wind. He remembered what Sugriva had said about the Rakshasa that drags shadows.

(The name that Sugriva mentioned is Angaraka. Now, it is Simhika. Moreover, according to Sugriva, there is only one such Rakshasa as this. How can the poet remember all these? How many crores of things should he fabricate for Rama's task!)

Hanuman expanded his body, made it small suddenly, entered the Simhika's mouth, pushed her into the sea and resumed his journey. All the gods in the sky felt happy and praised Hanuman. *(They too may go to Lanka along with Hanuman!)*

Hanuman was going forward. He saw gardens on the other bank of the sea. He crossed a hundred *yojanas*. *(Long jump!)* He reduced his body, climbed down on Lamba mountain and saw the city of Lanka.

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The city of Lanka is on the peak of Trikuta mountain. There is a deep trench around it. Rakshasa-warriors are guarding it with weapons. Hanuman felt disappointed on seeing its protective arrangements. "Even if Rama comes, how can he conquer this Lanka", he thought. *(Yes, one should speak the truth!)* "In fact, except Angada, Nila, Sugriva and I, none can come here. Then how will the task be done?" He felt worried for some time. "All right! First I will search for Sita. I will not spoil the actual work. Some stupid messengers destroy the assigned tasks completely. I will not do so like that. I will enter Lanka during the night." Seeing the city from a distance, he spent his time roaming about on the mountain.

It is night. Hanuman turned himself into a small size like that of a cat and landed on the streets of Lanka. Very wide royal paths. *(Otherwise Rakshasas can't fit into that width!)* Very high mansions! Seven storied and even eight storied. All are golden. *(The poet isn't partial. He is building the enemies' houses also in gold. Because all of them will come under Rama's possession, won't they?)* Plat forms in front of the houses and paths....every thing of gold. *(I will not say every time. Whether it is house, platform, tree or wall - you assume it is of gold. Not simply gold. It must also be studded with diamonds. Sometimes with gems! As you please! You stud them with whatever you want!)* Throughout Lanka, people decorated their houses with garlands of pearls and gold festoons. *(Have you seen this? This is how they did!)*

Hanuman remembered Sri Rama's valour and felt happy that Sri Rama could occupy Lanka. He thought, "Kumuda, Angada, Mainda, Dwividha, Ruksha, Kusaparva, Ketumala, Sugriva and I can enter this Lanka." **293**

The moon rose! The moon is white and charming like a royal swan.

The city of Lanka assumed the form of a goddess and saw Hanuman who was roaming in the streets.

"Who are you?" she roared.

"Who are you?" asked Hanuman.

"The goddess of Lanka", said the goddess of Lanka. *(We don't know what happened to her roaring. She herself told her name first.)*

"All right! Since you have asked me, I will tell you the truth. I have come to see Lanka. That's all. I will leave after seeing it", said Hanuman.

The goddess of Lanka's eyes turned red in anger. "No, you can't. You can't see Lanka without conquering me", she slapped Hanuman.

Hanuman hit the goddess of Lanka. The goddess of Lanka fell down and said, "Save me Vanara! Don't kill me. I am a woman. Roam about as you like. Brahma had in fact told me in the past, 'When a Vanara comes and conquers you, realize that harm has befallen Lanka'. It has happened exactly like that. Lankeswara has cursed Lanka. *(Ravana might have abducted the wife of Lankeswara).* Because of the vile Ravana, the entire race of Rakshasas will perish. Roam as you please. Search for Sita", she saluted him.

Instead of entering through the main entrance, Hanuman jumped over the wall just as enemies enter and went inside. He first put forward his left leg. *(Is that left leg such a mean thing? Poor leg, why such a slighted look at it?)*

All the royal roads were decorated with gems and pearls.

Hanuman was leaping over the houses

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293. Sundara kanda, sarga 2, sloka 30: See what Hanuman is thinking about who can go to Lanka. "Among the valorous Vanaras, Angada the son of Vali, Nila, courageous Sugriva and I - only these four of us are capable of coming to Lanka.

Sarga 3, slokas 15 & 16: See how many people are going to Lanka this time. This is also what Hanuman thought. "Kumuda, Angada, Mainda, Dwividha, Sushena, Sugriva, Kusaparva, Ruksha, Ketumala and I can enter and see Lanka which is impossible for others. Ten people in all. Of course, Sushena said he can leap up to 80 *yojanas*, when Angada asked him. Nila who was in the first list is not there in the second list. When the poet sits to write this sloka, who ever comes to his memory, all of them can go to Lanka. Others cannot go. This is the secret of going to Lanka. ★

(where will the monkey mentality go?) Auspicious instruments of music were heard from the mansions. Women were singing. The sounds of anklets, waist belts, bangles! Some people were reciting the Vedas. Some were reciting the eulogy of Ravana. *(Yes, whoever rules, his eulogy goes on! Eulogy of Pullayya in the kingdom of Pullayya!)* Some were praying. Some were one-eyed, some one-eared, some one-legged. *(They may be people who had lost their legs, hands, eyes and noses and survived from the battles Ravana had waged!)* Some Rakshasas were beautiful. Men and women were passing their time merrily with intoxicating drinks. Some women were shining like crescent moons. Some women were like petals. Some women were naked, some lost in thoughts, some in ecstasy! Some women were going to meet their lovers (*Poor ladies, how far did they have to go!*) Some women are comfortable with their lovers in the own homes. (*This is a shrewd way!*)

Hanuman saw the mansions of Vibhushana, Kumbhakarna, Indrajit and many other mansions while searching for Sita. Sita was to be found no where. (*As readers may wonder if Hanuman had a defect in his vision, the poet said, "Hanuman - who has good eye sight and lustre and can see well even the smallest article from any distance." So, don't wonder, 'if Hanuman had looked for her properly?'*)

After looking all the houses, Hanuman came to Ravana's mansion. (*The poet accompanied by Hanuman came to this place before and suddenly jumped into another house!*)

Ravana's mansion was on the peak of a mountain. There was a trench round it. Beyond the trench, there were high walls. All the walls were of gold. (*We know it! You need not tell us all the time!*) There were many army commanders guarding the walls, in gold chariots! They had never known any burden. Any suffering. *(Yes, they suffer if they rest at home without guarding the king!)*

There were many spies watching the activities of those commanders. (*Stupid spies! Bad spies who cannot identify when enemies are roaming about freely!*)

There are thousands of horses, elephants and chariots around Ravana's mansions. Among the elephants, there are elephants that have four tusks each. (*Where did he find this race?*) Wherever we look, tusk-made airplanes. Wherever you look, golden seats. Wherever you look, steps studded with gems. (*Oh! We know it! Gold! Gems! Diamonds! We know it! We know! We know!*)

There are many chambers in the mansion of Ravana. Play grounds, bars, houses to stay in the morning, houses to stay in the afternoons, evening houses, night houses, midnight houses - (*It takes the whole day for the king to roam about in all these houses. As soon as the king goes into a house and sits in it, the maids will say, "Your Excellency! Please get up! It is after noon! Then again another house. "Your Excellency! Please get up! It is evening!"*)

Hanuman saw all the galleries of paintings. He saw the armouries. He saw treasuries filled with heaps of money, gold and gems. The wealth of all the worlds was with Ravana.

He got on board the Pushpak airplane. The whole thing was a lump of gold. *(All right! All right! I told you I know it.)* The wealth and greatness in that airplane was not small! *(Then how much is it?)* There was no place which was not studded with precious stones. Many kinds of glittering stones! Pictures! They painted the sky, stars, seas, globe and every thing in that airplane. They carved Brahma sitting on the lotus. *(What about the picture in which Brahma slid into water?)* Also the paintings of sages and gods. The Pushpak plane goes wherever its boarders want it to go. *(If two people board and ask it to go in two different directions?)* When we look at that plane, with its beauty and luxury it appeared as if a city of heaven had descended on to the earth. Hanuman searched the whole plane. Sita is not there!

The harem in which Ravana was sleeping with his wives was charming. It was like a *feast to the eyes*. Ravana had thousands of wives. *(This is a shrewd idea! It does not matter even* *if enemies abduct any number of wives. Still there remain many wives. Look at Rama! Because he has only one wife, see how spring and other seasons harassed him!)*

Among them, some were those whom Ravana had married. Ravana abducted some women not out of infatuation for them but due to his enmity with their relatives. *(What sort of justice is this? If he has enmity with relatives, he ought to abduct those relatives!)*

Thousands of beautiful damsels were sleeping on blankets studded with gems. All of them drank intoxicants, played, sang, were tired and looked like flowers in a lake. Their ornaments, garments, garlands were scattered here and there. Their naked thighs, waists and breasts looked like sand dunes found in the rivers. All the women held their hands in one another's hands, intertwined with each other and looked like garlands. *(Thousand of women for one man! How much beauty does the poet see in their lives!)* Among those women, there were Rakshasas as well. *(So Rakshasas also look beautiful! Somehow Surpanakha appeared very ugly to the poet!)* There are human women, Gandharva women. *(If Sita too had accepted Ravana, she would have slept here in a corner!)* Ravana had brought all those women when they were yet unmarried. Ravana brought none of the women forcibly. *(Again forgetfulness of the poet!)* All had come attracted by Ravana's handsomeness. *(Although Ravana is a wicked character, when it is a question of women, the poet glorifies Ravana more than those women. In order to say that Sita had rejected such a handsome man!)* None of them is ugly. None of them have failed to serve the husband (Ravana). All are devoted wives. All are beautiful. All are young. (*High family, beauty, youth, devotion to the husband - only these are the features which women ought to have!*) None of those women violate the morals. They don't love men other than their husband. *(But the husband desires thousands of women except the wife! That is great morality!)* Among the women whom Ravana had brought, none was a married woman except Sita. *(If Ravana had brought Sita before her marriage, she would have lived with him happily. There was no greatness of Rama. Whoever abducts her is her husband!)*

Ravana was sleeping on a beautiful cot. A tusk round that cot. Gold inside it. (*Alas! Gold should be outside, shouldn't it be? All can then see it.*) Gold steps to climb up to the cot! The top of the cot is made of silk and golden lace. Chairs were kept near the cot. *(It is a lot of labour to get down from that cot, wasn't it? Are the chairs meant for taking rest after getting down from the cot?)*

On the cot, Ravana looked like a blue sky with glittering ornaments. The Mandara Mountain filled with flower trees. He looked like a fat elephant swimming in a stream.

His shoulders had warts due to the injuries he had received in battles. His hands were like five-headed snakes. He hissed like a great snake sleeping in the cave. *(That's it! It means he was snoring. Leaving the snoring husbands, wives ought to look for those who do not snore! Otherwise how can they sleep?)* The crown on his head was slightly askew. *(Poet-sir, he has ten heads! Please try to remember that. There are nine more crowns.)* The ornaments were in disarray. All the wives were near his feet. *(Towards the feet!)* Seeing Ravana's wives, Hanuman thought, "So many thousands of wives enjoying pleasure with their husband. How nice it would have been if Rama's wife was also so happy with her husband?

He saw a beautiful woman on another bed at a distance. She is Mandodari! He felt happy thinking her to be Sita. He again *fell in doubt*. "Sita is a great devoted wife. She was born in a family that practised devotion to the husband traditionally. Except with her husband, she won't sleep with another man", he thought.

"Is it proper if I see women like this?" he felt sorry. Again he freed himself from sadness thinking, "It is not my fault. My heart is pure. It is not wrong to search for a woman amidst other women.

However much he searched, Sita was nowhere seen. He had *not left even a four-inch space* in Lanka without searching for Sita.

As Sita wasn't found, Hanuman was lost in thought. "Sita must have died. Or, Ravana must have killed her out of anger. Will Rama live if I say that Sita was not seen anywhere? He will definitely *close his eyes* (die). *(Even if he closes, he will again open. Though he has fainted many a time, he recovered very quickly.)* If Rama *closes his eyes* Lakshmana too *closes his eyes*. Then Bharata to *will close*. Then Satrughna and thereafter their mothers. Next, all the people in Ayodhya will *close their eyes*!

In Kishkindha too, Sugriva will close his eyes. Ruma, Tara and Angada will close their eyes. I too have to close my eyes inevitably. All the people in Kishkindha will die for the sake of the king. Some by jumping from the mountain, some by hanging themselves, some by stabbing themselves, some by consuming poison, some by braking their heads - All will perish. In this manner all will give up their lives for the sake of Rama.[294]

In case they do not die, Rama will get all the Vanaras killed. *(What is this? Why? Like showing one's anger for one's mother-in-law on the pot!)* That's why I will not at all go to Kishkindha....Over there! It seems like Asokavana. I will also look there. *(Poet-sir! a while ago, you said that he did not miss searching 'even a space of four inches'? It would have been nice if you had said that 'he searched many places but Sita was nowhere to be seen'. Just as Dasaratha had a commitment to truth, do you have a commitment to untruth? All lies fall when you open your mouth!)*

Hanuman climbed the compound walls of Asokavana. There are many small gardens within that garden. There are mountains, lakes and mansions. *(All right! Enough! All the mansions are made of gold.)* Even trees are of gold. To search for Sita, Hanuman first disturbed the birds on the trees. *(Does Sita sit in the nests?)* Birds woke up with sleepy eyes and flew making lot of noise. *(One should do things without making any noise? What an intelligent messenger!)* Because of the flying of birds, all flowers fell on Hanuman and he turned into the god of the spring. *(To make Hanuman the god of spring, one need not disturb the birds. It is enough if you make the wind blow.)* The ground in that garden was studded with gold. *(Why? To skid on it quickly?)* There are many ground level wells - with steps studded with gems! The tree branches leaned into the streams and stopped the streams as if all the relatives were begging a woman not to go away leaving her husband. At every place there were gold platforms. And umbrellas over them! With creepers and Kalpatarus *(wishing trees of paradise)*, Asokavana is like the beautiful garden of Indra, Kubera's garden and Gandha Madana mountain. *(If it is so beautiful, why do you want to come back from there, Sita? Why don't you stay there!)*

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[294] **Sundara kanda, sarga 31, slokas 13 to 38:**

Hanuman thinks what will happen if he goes and tells Rama that Sita was nowhere to be seen. "If I tell him the unpleasant words, Rama will give up his life and will not live. Seeing Rama, Lakshmana will not live. Hearing about the death of Rama and Lakshmana, Bharata will not live. Seeing Bharata's death, Satrughna will not live. This is how the chapter on deaths in Ayodhya went on for some time. Later in Kishkindha, "Seeing the plight of Rama, Sugriva who is a truthful man, will give up his life. *(So giving up life is like emitting smoke from the cigar!)* Ruma gives up her life because of her husband's death. Stricken with grief Tara will give up her life. Then how can Angada stay alive? Stricken with grief over the death of their king, all the Vanaras will jump en masse from the peaks of the mountain and give up their lives. They will break their heads with palms and fists. They will give up their lives by consuming poison, by hanging themselves, by entering the fire, by fasting and by falling on the swords." Ayodhya and Kishkindha will perish if Rama dies. It would be nice if Rama dies at least once. We could have seen whether it would really happen or not. Of course, we have seen what happened when Dasaratha died. ★

Hanuman climbed on a Simsupa tree and looked around. He saw a mansion at a distance. *(All right! Its platforms...windows are made of gold weren't they? Oh! The mention of gold is making my stomach turn.. Isn't there the smell of earth?)*

A beautiful woman is sitting in that mansion. She is very weak. *(Alas! Is she so weak? Will, then, Rama accept her? He wants her to be very strong!)* Yet she is like the crescent moon. *(Oh, so, she is beautiful!)* She is unkempt without bath and adornment. Yet she is bright like a flower in the mud. *(Because she is a devoted wife, she ought not to take a bath and be comfortable. But she must look beautiful!)*

Her head bent, that woman was grieving.

'She is Sita', thought Hanuman. He remembered her appearance which he had seen from Rishyamuka when Ravana was carrying her away. She was still wearing the same yellow sari which she had worn at that time. She appeared incomplete as she did not have some ornaments.

Rakshasa women were around her and guarded her with weapons. They were very ugly. Some had flat noses. Some had bulbous noses. Some didn't have noses at all. Some had ears *like winnowing fans*. Some had no ears at all. Some had the feet of an elephant. Some had no feet at all. Some were very short and stout. Some were very tall and thin. Some had bare heads. Some had bushy hair. While some were like camels, the others were dwarfs with hunchbacks. Some had faces like winnowing fans. Some with dog-like faces, some with fox-faces, some with elephant-faces and some with lion-faces.

(In this scene, the poet used as per meter the entire grammar lesson of antonyms.)

Amidst such Rakshasa-women, Sita is shining like a star that slid to the earth. *(Hanuman saw all the limbs of Sita! Round breasts, smooth thighs, and even beautiful soles of the feet! He saw her breasts as well! Round!)*

On seeing Sita, he thought, "Sita is a heap of beauty. A great devoted wife. She is waiting for a sight of her husband. Just as a boat sinks in the sea due to the weight of the goods, Sita is drowned in the sea of sorrow due to the separation from her husband. - Alas! How could Rama live so long without such a wife?" *(Hanuman! We too have the same doubt!)*

"Rama knows pretty well how to rule a kingdom, how to pacify elephants and horses but it seems he does not know how to love his wife! That is why he is living without any worry. Is Sita important or hegemony over the three worlds? Sita is important. Compared to Sita, the hegemony over the three worlds does not count even as one sixteenth. But however great one may be, one has to accept destiny, doesn't one?[295]

Sri Rama is *rich in great strength*. He is so valorous that he can bear and overcome his entire grief. Just as a king regains kingdom that he has lost, Rama will feel extremely happy as soon as he sees Sita." - Hanuman felt happy

The east was turning red slowly! Dawn was breaking the darkness! ★

[Translation: **B. R. Bapuji**]

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[295] **Sundara kanda, sarga 15, sloka 53:** "Sri Ram is efficient in controlling the elephants and horses and ruling the kingdom but he has not understood he should love his wife."

Sundara kanda, sarga 16, sloka 14: "If ruling the three worlds is compared with Sita, ruling the three worlds cannot be equal to one-sixteenth part of Sita."

Because Hanuman thought like this, we should not assume that Hanuman misunderstood Rama. This amounts to highlighting Sita's speciality. ★

Story-9

Sita and Ravana

[An important point before reading this story. Sita stayed at Ravana's place for a very long time. A question arises, 'Whether Ravana molested Sita or not?'

In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Ravana did not molest Sita.

As Sita was a great-devoted wife and she ought to be a chaste woman, the poet had created a curse for Ravana. In sarga 13 of *Yuddha kanda* and sarga 26 of *Uttara kanda*, there is a mention of this curse.

In *Yuddha kanda*, when he came to know that Sita did not accept Ravana, Ravana's minister Mahaparva tells Ravana, "Seduce her following the kukkuta *nyaya* ('justice of cock'); don't hesitate." Then Ravana reveals the actual fact, "I have a curse. It is a secret." Once Ravana had molested a nymph called Punjakasthala. She went to Brahma and told him about it. Then Brahma cursed Ravana, "If you molest a woman who does not desire you, your head will break into a thousand pieces."

In *Uttara kanda*, while narrating the entire story of Ravana, the sages tell Rama, "When Ravana molested Rambha, Nalakubara cursed Ravana." On the whole, the essence of the matter is the same. The poet created a curse for Ravana and protected Sita's chastity.

While examining this story from the viewpoint of reality, Ravana need not have bothered about this curse. Just as a debauchee abducts a woman and behaves with her in a particular manner, Ravana also could have behaved with Sita in the same manner.

In fact molestation is not only connected with the relationship between the bodies of men and women. Abducting a woman against her will is also molestation. Abduction itself is molestation. Just as it is no fault of hers when some one abducted hers, it is no fault of her when that man behaves with her in any manner. Therefore, we should not think that we have to specifically conclude whether Ravana seduced Sita or not.

The story of ".....Poisonous Tree" also proceeds in accordance with Valmiki. As the aim of this book is not to change the theme of the story of Valmiki, in this story also, we don't find any physical relationship between Ravana and Sita, except that Ravana brings her to Lanka forcibly. This story tells us the fact that Ravana is compelling Sita to accept him.]

Sita is like a heavenly nymph who is unmoved in meditation and penance-like concentration. Sita is like a *Kasi* flower that has fallen off unconsciously out of grief. Without decoration and ornaments, she is like a lake without lotuses and a *Jaji* creeper whose flowers have all fallen off. Having thought and thought, tired, becoming weak, remaining silent, she is like a hardened statue and an idol. Sita is disappointed and depressed like a baby bird whom the hunter has caught alive. Sita is like a parent-less child whom her relatives have left mercilessly in a forest during a severe drought. With tears dried up after continual grieving, Sita is like an extinct volcano.

Sita in *Asoka vana* (griefless garden) is immersed in grief.

The garden around Sita's harem in Ayodhya was also called Asoka vana. But there was no joy in this Asoka vana as she had in that Asoka vana. These trees, Nature, the day and night were causing fear.

Like a white swan, which has reached the bank after swimming in the blue waters, the moon in the sky disappeared behind the clouds.

With a cool breeze, a shower of flowers and the chirping of birds, the sun is rising in the Asoka vana charmingly.

With *wishes as horses*, the mind as a chariot, Sita is travelling to her husband. She is sighing with the weight of past memories. She embraces *Mother* earth with pathetic looks.

The memories of beauty of sunrise and sunset in Chitrakuta, Panchavati and on the bank of the Ganga have become as distant as past births. The sight of her husband appears to have occurred some ages ago, some millions of years ago….There is no emancipation from this hell for many more births. The worship, the religious vows that she has been performing with extreme devotion and interest beginning from her childhood have gone waste like a cowry. Thousands of doubts, suspicions raise their heads from her soul like snakes that rise from the anthill. *Sita within Sita* is troubling Sita by questioning her repeatedly and fearlessly every moment.

Sita had thought if a man other than her husband looks at her at any moment he would burn into ashes the next moment. Sita had thought that the miracle of her devotion to her husband protected her like a shield and raised flames of fire and burn all the surroundings to ashes. But…. somehow all the spirits had kept quiet seeing such a terrifying deed. All the gods were silence! The sun and the moon had not moved out of their original positions. No god had come to her rescue. No great power has rescued her. At last, her devotion to her husband too had become powerless before Ravana's wickedness. She could not do anything except wail like an ordinary woman.

She had heard that devoted wives had performed many great deeds in the past. She was aware of many stories full of miracles. Savitri had saved the life of her husband with the miracle of her devotion to their husband. Anasuya had done many great deeds with the *punya* (piety) that she had earned. Damayanti could retain king Nala because she was a great-devoted wife. Alas! Am I not a devoted wife like those pious women? Did I fall short in my service to my husband? But, my word, tears, anger and curses have become powerless! When another man dragged me forcibly, I could not save myself except shed tears relentlessly!

'I left you uncursed because I had no orders from my husband,' I said this only to threaten that wicked man. It has been proved that I do not have the strength of moving even a blade of grass. Many sages have given me many boons! They blessed me that very great miracles would happen! Even the words of sages have not been fruitful.

Is my husband's power also the same? He has not made any attempts to rescue his lawful wife even after so many months. Is it impossible even for him to defy the deeds of this wicked man? Is Rama too an ordinary man?

Sita could never tolerate that thought. If she had such a thought, she felt an unbearable hostility against herself. Should I doubt the capabilities of my husband? He is not an ordinary man. He is the best among men. A very great valorous man. One who frightens the enemies. If he has not rescued me so far, it is all the result of my past deeds and past birth. A great sin that I may have committed in the remote past. What can anybody else do about that? I have to face it.

How much did I abuse Lakshmana on that day!... I uttered unwarranted words!.... It is surprising even today! I don't find any reason why I doubted Lakshmana so much! I, myself, made that innocent man feel sad with unwarranted words. *The goddess of bad luck entered my mouth.* Because of this fate, I may have talked like that.

Shedding tears profusely, Sita recollected the past…. again…. again… again! How much the brothers must be grieving to learn about my whereabouts?

Did Jatayu tell them all that happened? Did he lose his life before he told them? How much must they grieve when they couldn't find me in the cottage! How much did they doubt!.... Did my husband — who went for the deer — return to the cottage safely? Did this vile man do any harm to Sri Rama with the ill motive of abducting me? Who can defy the great valorous man Sri Rama?.... Maybe, after having completed the exile, he might have gone back to Ayodhya. When my husband himself has rejected me, why should I live?.... Why should

I wait for months? [296]

Elders say that death does not approach a person when he still has some years to live. Otherwise, would I live so long, away from my husband?..... What is the use even if I have a strange wish of leaving this body?.... It seems to be impossible. In the past, I thought that I would not be able to live even for a moment away from my husband. But, this body has been safe all these months! She has been hungry. She has been eating and sleeping. These properties of the body were causing shame to Sita.

Vexed by such thoughts, pondering over her fate, cursing her plight, Sita shed tears.

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[296] **Sundara kanda, sarga 28, slokas 12 to 15:** See, what Sita in Asoka vana thinks about Ravana. "Thinking that Sri Rama is god, that Sri Rama is the saviour, fasting, sleeping on the floor, believing that husband alone is god. — All these are futile. Rama! I being depressed, having lost my charm, I have no hope of meeting you. My *punya* has gone waste. Rama! As per the command of your father you have completed the exile, reached Ayodhya, without any fear (*without any fear that he would lose the kingdom this time*), you will enjoy beautiful women. I, who am grieving, will give up my life soon either by consuming poison or by cutting my throat with a knife. But here there is no one who will give me the knife. What can I do?" This was the line of Sita's thoughts. Sita had no unperturbed confidence in her husband. She doubted her husband. She grieves that he would forget her, go to Ayodhya and live happily with other women. While Sita is in this state here, there Rama also doubts Sita similarly, "Is Sita chaste or not?"

Sita has no confidence in Rama's vow of commitment to one wife. Rama has no confidence in Sita's devotion to husband. The 'beauty' of the married life of Sita and Rama is also like the beauty of the married lives of all other people in society. While describing the married life of Sita and Rama as an ideal married life, the poet has shown here an ordinary married life. Why? The poet observes the society that is around him. He sees the values that are present in the social climate. He does not know any ideal beyond the society. It is not possible even for the poet to see ideal married life that does not exist in society. The poet thinks within the scope of society and within its limits. That is why, however much a poet describes the 'ideal married life', the reality existing in society reveals itself in his writings.

The married life of Sita and Rama was not ideal. They were also like other wives and husbands in society. Superiority and inferiority, anger, desires, doubts. — They too had all these qualities.

If the poet had written that Sita did not doubt her husband at all or she did not feel sad even though he had not protected her, it would have looked very unnatural. Hence, the poet rightly depicted the grief and doubts of Sita. But, at the end, Sita consoles herself saying that it was her bad luck. This is also something, which all people in the world do.

"Rama! Although I placed my hope in you for a long time and did penance and religious rituals, you could not rescue me as I did not have the *punya* in the previous birth and am unlucky. This is my sin. No doubt about it" — Everything is Sita's sin. There is no inefficiency on the part of Rama! The poet always takes care to defend Rama. Here the 'theory of past deeds' is saving Rama from Sita's doubts. Though she has many doubts about the miracle of her devotion to her husband and on the miracles of her husband, she suppressed those doubts. She tries to convince herself.

With regard to the question 'whether Rama had wives other than Sita', the critics consider this context in which Sita talked with dejection. As Sita said, 'You will go to Ayodhya and live happily with beautiful women', the critics infer that Rama had many wives. But, based on Sita's words which she uttered due to depression and grief, if they infer like this, it cannot be a fair criticism.

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"The king!.... the king!....", the female attendants around Sita are in a tumult of confusion. The maid servants run around in the Asoka vana. The tumult of Ravana's arrival is heard. The noise of the ornaments of women accompanying the king, various kinds of voices, laughter… announce his arrival…..!

Sita trembled like a bird that has no nest in the midst of a cyclone. 'Will my devotion to my husband be broken? Will my life be spoiled?' Sita shed tears profusely.

With his wives around him, Ravana came in front of Sita.

Hanuman, who was hiding on the tree held his breath and moved into the leaves in order to look at Ravana.

With red garments and a smearing of red sandal paste, Ravana was like a red-stone statue. There were ornaments all over the body. He wore brightly shining ear rings. Round the waist, there is a snake-shaped waist band studded with blue precious stones. The moustache was glowing with scented oils. He had covered his shoulders with a red cloth.

The woman attendants fan him. They hold umbrellas. Some maids held various kinds of intoxicated drinks in golden jars and stood near him humbly.

Some maids carried a mound like seat and kept it near Ravana.

Ravana's wives glittered with ornaments in the soft shine of the evening.

Adjusting the cloth round his waist, Ravana stared at Sita.

Sita trembled. She shrank. She would have liked to disappear at once if she had the power to do it.[297]

"O beautiful lady! Don't fear! Don't hide your beauty. Let me see and enjoy your round breasts… your smooth thighs… your wide hips… all your limbs! All your limbs are places of beauty. Your lotus-like eyes, pearls-like eyelids, fine cheeks…. thin waist… beautiful buttocks…. Ah! Whatever limb I look at, my attention remains fixed. Can any man be undesirous of such a beautiful mass like you? It is amazing how Brahma left you after creating you! I have never seen such an *all-worldly beautiful* woman like you, you know?"

Whenever he came to see Sita, Ravana *extremely* praised Sita's beauty. He knew that his praise regarding her beauty made Sita happy.

While Ravana praised Sita's beauty, his wives looked at each other's face sarcastically. They whispered among themselves. Later they talked to each other about it.

"Sister! Compared to whom in the world is Sita beautiful?"

"She is the most beautiful of all the women in the eyes of the king. Hasn't our beauty become old?.... Likewise, her beauty too will become old by tomorrow."

"His infatuation for us cooled down since we yielded to him. But Sita will not yield, will she?"

"Yes, I don't think she will accept him.

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[297] **Sundara kanda, sarga 19, sloka 3. Also sarga 20, sloka 2:** "Seeing him Sita Devi covered her abdomen with her thighs, breasts with hands and sat wailing." Seeing Sita in such a posture, Ravana said, "Oh, woman with thighs like elephant's trunk! Frightened on seeing at me, you are not showing me your body by covering your breasts and belly". If Ravana had uttered such words or spoken in some such manner, it would suit his character. Ravana ought to talk like this. But, if the poet too speaks the same way even in his own descriptions? The poet himself is unable to restrain himself from seeing Sita's breasts!

The poet is expressing Sita's grief as follows: "Wetting her big breasts with tears, thinking of her husband, Sita grieved a lot. Breasts — that are big, round and that touched each other — are trembling and Sita is frightened." The poet shows the entire fear of Sita in her breasts. This is not addressing Sita as *Susroni! Sumadhye!* in the middle of a sloka. The actual description relates specifically to Sita's breasts. Enthusiasm to describe Sita's limbs overwhelms poets. Whether it is Sita or *Sri Maha Lakshmi*, both are the same. If it is a happy scene, the breasts of that woman move with joy. If it is grief, they move with sadness.

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That's why she appears to be more beautiful. We only had done foolishly."

Those women always talked the same thing in tears.

Ravana's behaviour surprised Sita day after day. He expressed all his desire for me. Prayed to me to accept him. Praised. Reprimanded. Threatened me — everything orally. More than that, he didn't show any wickedness. He merely requested me to be kind to him but did not resort to violence. Refineness of many births! Or, the result of a curse by some great men! It is only a matter of a dream to protect myself if he intends to insult me!

The day he kept in Asoka vana, Ravana told her. "I will not force you. I will not touch you without your willingness. You should develop a fondness for me and desire me."

Sita could not believe it.

But, until today, Ravana is behaving the same way. He will no longer be patient towards me. On some day, he will surely insult me. Shall I have freedom from this wicked man!

"Sita! Listen to me. You be the queen among my wives. I have abducted many beautiful women with my valour. All of them will serve you. I will give you whatever money you want. I will give you whatever extent of land that you wish for. You can donate them as you like. You can worship and observe religious vows as you please. I will give great gifts to all your relatives and please them. All of them will keep visiting you. If you want, I will conquer any number of cities and keep them under your father's control. Ask for all that you want and make me happy. You exercise full authority over my kingdom...... Your breasts are beautiful."

Talking with eyes, whispers and sighing were taking place among Ravana's wives. One woman kept her head on the shoulder of another and said, "Sister! He had told me exactly this!" Her eyes welled up with tears. "Sister! He described my beauty like this!"

"He told me the same thing! The king has no mercy on us. Don't grieve."

"He said he couldn't live without me even for a moment and I thought it was true.... Now, the king does not derive pleasure from us, sister!..... Is all the love of the king for Sita alone?"

"You innocent girl!.... Why does a man have 'love' for a woman? All that he has is sexual desire."

Ravana declared all his heroism in front of Sita. He described his valour. He gave her numbers as to how many women had yielded to him. Thinking that Sita would surely accept him if she heard him fully, every time Ravana recounted the list of all his luxuries and wealth.

"Sita! I have conquered many hundreds of kings in battles. Torturing many and plundering many enemy towns, I have accumulated invaluable treasures. You are the authority of my luxuries and wealth. There is none who can equal me in heroism. See my fame. See my valour. See my wealth. If you are sensible, enjoy yourself with me. Enjoy all my luxuries and wealth. Forget Rama. That base fellow is not fit to be your husband."

Ravana's words were not new to Sita. Yet, she felt humiliated and tried to look at him defiantly. The *Sita within Sita* cautioned her. "Sita! Don't be hasty! Don't make him angry. Stupid fellow. Be shrewd. Pray to him. Get his grace... It is better. Don't praise Rama's valour in his presence."

Ravana turned aside, received the jar from the female attendant, drank liquor and wiped his moustache with his upper garment. "My love! How long will you grieve wastefully? You don't adorn yourself. You sleep on the floor. How long will you fast and remain sleepless? Heed my words. Many beautiful women will decorate you. Silk garments, priceless ornaments of gems, the fragrance of sandal wood, drinks, beds, seats, dances, songs, sauntering about in the gardens — enjoy all these and forget yourself every moment, you live! I would like to see you adorn yourself well and move about in the gem-mansions smiling.... Your thighs are like trunks of an elephant. You have become thin due to grief and look more beautiful than before. Your thin waist has become thinner and creates desire in me. Your youth is wasted day after day. The current of a stream that flows forward will never come back, will it? Similarly, time will not come back. Heed my words. Enjoy yourself with me. Change your heart from that Rama. Rama is an utter pauper. He has no wealth. Rama cannot excel me in penance, strength, valour, wealth or in any thing. He cannot even become an equal to me. How can he make you happy in that ascetic life? In fact it is doubtful whether Rama is alive. What is the use even if he were alive? Can he come here?.... Can he break through this Lanka? How long will you harbour these futile hopes? Rama cannot rescue you. He is incompetent….."

As she heard Ravana's words, Sita was stricken with unbearable grief. Sita within Sita expressed her doubt to Sita, "It may be true Sita! Sri Rama may not be able to come to Lanka…. Even if he can, he might not have intended to come. He might have kept quiet thinking that he would not accept again a woman whom another man has stolen."

Unable to control her grief, Sita shed tears profusely. She had prayed to Ravana many a time in the past. She begged him to send her back to her husband. She reprimanded him that it was not fair to keep another man's woman in his custody. She threatened that Rama would destroy Lanka completely if he did not hand her over to her husband. "My husband is kind hearted. A saviour of those in danger. Loves those who take refuge in him. He will pardon you", she gave him confidence. She tried in all ways — by means of good words or threats that he would realize his mistake and have change of heart.

Ravana remained unmoved for any thing. Moreover, he always ridiculed her, "Why hasn't that great man rescued you for so long?"

Sita did not have any answer. She had no confidence in her soul.

"O beautiful lady! Forget that Rama! Whatever sin you committed in some past birth, you have suffered the punishment of forest life. Your sin is over. Now you need to live happily…. How beautiful your cheeks are! I am *burning with the heat of cupid.*"

Sita turned her face away defiantly. "Ravana! I have made it clear many times. Your desire cannot be fulfilled. Devoted wives live with only one husband. I will not violate tradition. You are not aware of our family reputation", said Sita seriously.

"O beautiful lady! You too are not aware of the custom of our race. Moving with other women is not a sin in our race. It is the custom of our race to steal women forcibly.[298] Our marriage is justified. It is a *Rakshasa marriage*.

"It is a marriage for you. Not for me. That is the tradition of your race. It is not our tradition. For me a marriage can be once. Only one man is my husband. However long you may keep me in forcible custody, I will say the same thing. Love your wives. Don't have any infatuation for me. Follow the right path. Just as you protect your wives, you have to protect others' wives as well….."

Ravana laughed. "Sita! Others should protect their own wives."

"You have riches and wealth. You have strength and valour. You don't follow the right path. You don't have good conduct. If you had it too, you would be the best. My husband is not a debauchee like you. He is the best among men. He is committed to one wife only. He is such a pious man that he cannot look at any woman other than me. Even if I am away from my husband I am always with him. My husband is never away from my heart. Did Suvarchala Devi, leave the sun even though many dangers befell her? Did Sachi Devi leave Indra? Rohini Devi followed the moon, Arundhati followed Vasista, Lopamudra followed Agasthya, Savitri followed Satyavanta, Sukanya followed sage Chyavana, Srimati Devi followed Kapila, Damayanti followed king Nala, Madayanti followed king Sowdama, Kesini followed emperor Sagara, and Anasuya followed sage Atri. In the wake of many difficulties they did not leave the feet of their husbands. In the same manner my devotion to my husband has not weakened. Sita Devi will follow only Sri Rama. You cannot delude me by giving me authority in your harem. You cannot control me by bringing all your riches and wealth under my control. You have separated me when I was happy in the shadow of my husband. When my husband holds the bow, he will become very violent *just as the wind assists fire*. Just as Vamana confiscated the entire wealth of the Rakshasas, my husband will conquer you and save me. Just as sages do not abandon Yoga knowledge, my husband will not abandon me. It is only a matter of his getting angry.... then killing you and saving me.... it will not take even one moment."

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[298] **Sundara kanda, sarga 20, sloka 5:** "It is the custom of Rakshasas to '*move*' with other women and to steal other women forcibly."

Regarding abducting unmarried girls, there are episodes in the past history that appear as customs of some races. Carrying away of Rukmini by Krishna with her consent. Bhishma carries away Amba, Ambika and Ambalika by waging battles without knowing their views and wishes. These stories are familiar to all.

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Sita within Sita was already warning him, "You say your husband will do things in one moment if he gets angry. Then has he not got angry so far? Is it the same man — who can do things in one moment — that has neglected you for so many months?..... Don't talk so boastfully. Later you will have to feel ashamed."

None of these warnings entered Sita's ears. Her emotion did not recede. "To kill you my brother-in-law alone is capable enough....." she turned her face away.

"Even now send me to my husband and take refuge in him. He is merciful to those who seek refuge in him. That will do you good."

Sita's words were not new to Ravana. He laughed carelessly. "I want you to be merciful to me. It will not be good for me to leave you. You are still calling Rama your husband. I can't tolerate it. Your husband is no longer Rama. It is me! Now Sita is Ravana's wife!"

"*Rama! Rama!* (Oh my god!)" Sita *closed her ears*. Her eyes reddened with anger. "You base fellow! When my husband *break*s your *mouth into a thousand pieces*, you will realize whose wife Sita is! Without even hesitating that I am king Dasaratha's daughter-in-law, you are prattling away. Unable to understand the valour of Sri Ramachandra, you are behaving like a fool. Born as a result of the boons of gods, my husband has performed many heroic deeds....."

"Sita! I too was also born as a result of a boon.[299] I have fought battles against many 'heroes among great heroes'. You exult that Rama alone is the hero."

"If you are more valorous than Rama... you have abducted a lonely helpless woman as a coward, in a disguise.... is it your valour?"

"Then, you also tell me the heroic deeds of that Sri Rama! Is it the heroism of that great man to catch a helpless woman, who came to him lonely and cut off her nose and ears? I did not abduct you as a coward. Used my wit, I retaliated against that base fellow in a fitting manner.[300]

Sita! Give up the illusion that Rama can conquer me! Relying on that base man, you are rejecting the Lord of Lanka who desires you. Even now think sensibly. The cupid is driving me towards you with arrows of flowers. Your beauty is making me mad day after day."

"Stupid fellow! You are a mad fellow because you are not able to understand the valour of Sri Rama, however much I have explained to you. Your prattling is unbearable to me. As I am not independent to curse you

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299. "Born due to a boon" — We have to compare these words with the present day words like 'vow' and 'religious ritual'. If a woman becomes pregnant after a vow to some god or religious ritual, all people believe that the child was born due to the grace of god. This is nothing but birth due to boon.

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300. Enemies insult each other's women. Rama had insulted a woman of Ravana's group. Ravana insulted a woman of Rama's group.

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and as I don't have my husband's command, I keep quiet, otherwise….."[301]

Ravana laughs sarcastically, "Do you want permission from your husband alone or do you want your father-in-law's consent as well?"

"Base fellow! You are ridiculing a devoted wife. Just as the sun sucks up water, my husband will suck up your arrogance. The sin of abducting other man's woman will make you suffer. It will be enough *if* my husband *raises* his *eye with anger*….You will *fall in the flames of fire and burn to ashes*. Just as a *Chandala* (an untouchable) cannot attain salvation, you can never get me."

While she abuses Ravana, Sita gets fresh and wonderful emotion. Another man desiring her and her refusal! It sends her into ecstasy. All the devoted wives in the world '*possess*' her. Then she believes strongly that gods are testing her chastity secretly. She abuses him in as many ways as a devoted wife abuses an outside man. In that act of rejecting another man, with her soul-stirring joy that she is a great-devoted wife, each atom of Sita's body goes into ecstasy and she experiences a heavenly feeling.[302]

She derived intense confidence from the fact that Ravana's not molesting her was the power of the miracle of her devotion to her husband. She got courage that gods were

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301. Sundara kanda, sarga 22, sloka 20: 'Sita is a devoted wife, isn't she? Does she not have the power to curse Ravana? Then why doesn't she curse him?" — Such questions as these arise, don't they? In response to such possible questions, the poet argues in this manner, "Well, why not?" Although Sita has the power to curse Ravana, she has kept quiet because she had no permission from her husband! Moreover, if she had cursed him, Sita's power would be exhausted and she would not have the power to protect her chastity. This is the poet's answer. If she had cursed Ravana, his menace would be over, isn't it? Later, there would not be any danger to her chastity. What need would be there to protect it?

See Sita's words: "You ought to be burnt into ashes! I have not burnt you into ashes since I do not have Rama's command to curse a man who has committed wrong and since I have to protect my chastity (*devotion or conjugal fidelity to the husband*)"

Suppose a lion comes near a devoted wife. Then she needs to ask her husband, "Oh, sir! I can kill this…. Do you want me to kill it or not?....." And she has to get her husband's permission. Suppose the husband is not in town. She has to keep quiet if the lion eats her up. Likewise, when a man abducts her, she has to let that man abduct her even though she has miracles to escape from him because she has no permission from the husband! To defend a lie that 'devoted wives have miracles', many more lies follow!

There is another aspect of this issue. What is the secret in 'exhausting this power'? Accumulating *punya* by doing penance and donating some piety once in a while to others! The basis for this imagination is — Money! In society, money has great power with it. Can secure respect as well. One can give money to others and receive it from others. Some times a balance remains. These aspects of money enter spiritual thoughts as well. One can derive great miraculous powers from penance and devotion to husbands. One can give and take such miracles. Sometimes they get exhausted, sometimes a balance remains. All miracles are like money! ★

302. Sundara kanda, sarga 22, sloka 10 to 12: "On seeing Ravana's threats to Sita, the young women of the gods and Gandharvas felt sad. Some women consoled Sita with signs of their lips, some with their faces and some with their eyes. Sita, who was thus consoled by them, felt proud due to the strength of her chastity."

Does this mean that young women of gods and Gandharvas are always in the sky? We have to assume that among Ravana's wives, there were women belonging to the gods and Gandharvas and it was they who consoled Sita with secret signs and gestures. ★

protecting her, seeing that she was right. 'What does it mean that I don't have power? I am very rich in powers! The miracle of my devotion to the husband alone is keeping this vile man at a distance. Is this base fellow, eligible to even touch my body? Will he not burn to ashes if he puts a step forward?"

"Ravana! Realize at least now. Don't invite death wantonly at the hands of Sri Rama. You do not know the valour of my husband. He will shoot down the sun and the moon. He will turn the universe upside down…. O king of Sea….." Sita stopped suddenly.

Sita within Sita doubts, hesitates. "Why do you say all those things that you have heard in the ancient stories? What is this felling of the sun and moon? What is this turning of the universe upside down?..... How can human beings do such things? Why don't you think a little before you talk?"

"You don't know. My husband is not a human being, though he is in human form. God is always in human form…. If he decides….." Sita goes into ecstasy.

Seeing Sita's silence, Ravana said with a smile, "Well, speak out Sita! What more can your husband do?"

Ravana was enthusiastic to see Sita talking to him even though she was angry. The abuses and curses of Sita — who is still another man's woman — amuse him. Compared to the beauty of his old, former wives, Sita's beauty appeared to be fresh and charming in a thousand ways. Sita's anger appeared to him like a romantic quarrel. Twirling his moustache, Ravana looked at Sita *serenely*.

Sita looked at Ravana grimly. "Is there none to teach you morals? All feel happy if danger befalls on wicked fellow like you. For the sin that you have committed, Yama may spare you but Rama will not. In front of my husband's valour, all your army will scatter away like snakes when they see the *Garuda* bird. You might have waged any number of battles. None of the enemies might have conquered you. But *like an animal tied to the sacrificial post*, death is inevitable for you at the hands of my husband. Like a huge tree that falls due to lightning, you will fall down because of Rama's bow. My husband will make the whole of Lanka full of dead bodies. Your kingdom will be filled with the smoke of the graveyard and flocks of eagles. You have this idea for the sake of your total destruction."

As he listened to Sita's words with amusement, Ravana gradually found less amusement than before and his anger increased *like* that of *a cobra whose tail is being stamped on*. "Foolish woman! Forgetting truth and untruth, becoming a senseless person and unable to understand the baseness of Rama, you are reciting your husband's name. If he is such a valorous man, why has your husband not rescued you all these days?"

"It is your fortune! The time of your death has not yet arrived. Your *sin is not yet ripe. That day has not yet pushed itself forward."*

"You base woman! I have to slay you for your harsh utterances. I have to punish you for taking the name of that Rama. Should a king of kings like me beg you? A man can take a rebuke from woman as much as he shows love for her. My desire for you is killing my anger. I will give you two more months' time. By then you ought to come to my bed." King Ravana twirled his moustache again.

Sita's determination surprised the wives of Ravana. Most of them had expressed their opposition to Ravana at the beginning. But they had to yield to him soon and accept him as their husband. But…. this Sita…..![303]

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303. Uttara kanda, sarga 24: [*As there is no Telugu translation of Uttara kanda by Mr. Gattupalli Seshacharyulu, the following are from the Telugu translation of Mr. Sripada Subrahmanya Sastry.*]

See how Ravana, after conquering the gods and returning to Lanka, carried away women. "While retuning home, the wicked Ravana captured many girls of gods, kings, sages, Rakshasas and humans and placed them into the air plane…. If he saw a beautiful woman — whether unmarried or married — he killed her relatives and put her into the airplane.

➔

"Hey Dhanyamalini!....Why does the king beg Sita?.... Did he behave with us this way too?"

"For me too it is surprising..... Thinking it was not good for him to molest an unwilling woman.... has he changed his mind.... and is begging like this?..... Any way, it is not safe for us if Sita sheds tears. The king is unkind."

The maids too show reverence to Sita. Though it is not new to them that the king confines women of other men, they behave very kindly, seeing Sita's sorrow.

The king roared at the maids that surround Sita. "It seems you have not made any attempts all these days?"

"Your Excellency! We have been making efforts."

"Try again and again. Make her yield to me. I will give whatever gifts you want."

Dhanyamalini held Ravana's hand smilingly. "Cool down your Excellency! Don't get upset by the rejection of this foolish woman. She is not fortunate enough to enjoy pleasures with a man like you. She has no luck to enjoy your luxuries and wealth. She does not belong to our race, or our caste. She cries, "Oh, our family custom.....!" She wails, "Oh, devotion to husband....!" Be kind and leave her alone! There is no use in increasing your fondness for her. Is it not an insult to you to beg a woman who does not want you? What joy will you feel with a woman who has no desire for you?.... We.... your loves.... who desire you.... aren't we here for you? Aren't there many other beautiful women whom you had chosen and brought?.... Your Excellency! Leave Sita. Enjoy our love!"

"Yes, lord! .... All of us were born to serve at your feet. We have never refused you!" All the wives of Ravana gathered round him.

Looking at Sita defiantly Ravana said, "See, how many women are waiting in the wings for my love and mercy. I have given you two months' time. Thereafter any way you have to come into my embrace." He looked at all maids with a warning and left the place.

All his wives followed the king, looked at Sita with reverence and wonder.

Hanuman was tempted a lot many a time to pounce upon Ravana from the tree.... but seeing his terrific form.... he felt discouraged every time.

Unable to control her grief, Sita lowered her head and began to wail loudly.

Ekajata, Harijata, Trijata,, Vikata, Durmukhi, Ajumukhi, Surpanakhi — all the maids gathered round Sita.

All had their hopes pinned on the gifts, which the king had promised.

Caressing the hair of Sita, Harijata tried to appease her, "Why do you unnecessarily grieve?... How respectful it would be for a woman to accept an offer when a man desires her?"

"Is that man an ordinary person? Virtually Ravana Brahma!.... You have seen how many women have become his wives?" Ekajata joined in the conversation.

"Each of his wives is eager to secure more grace than the other from their husband. When such a man is praying to you, you do not care him. What sort of sense do you have?" One maid wondered.

"Do you think that the king has kept quiet as he is not able to molest you? .... He is showing patience because he cannot trouble you out of his love for you ....We have never seen our king praying to a woman so pitifully ... Our hearts

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➔ One woman among them cried, "What will happen to my infant-child in my absence?"

"How much my parents are wailing for me!"

"For me, my husband is god. What will happen to me now?"

"What sin had I committed in the past?"

"Ugh! There is none who is a man of justice in this human world!" — Thus, all women wailed, thinking of their mothers, fathers, husbands and children.Earlier, the poet said that all the wives of Ravana had come willingly. But, this proves to be wrong here. ★

are melting, seeing his condition."

Raising her head angrily, Sita looked at their faces with angry eyes. "Who do you think I am? I am the daughter-in-law of King Dasaratha! I am the wife of Sri Ramachandra! You are uttering unspeakable words about a woman belonging to the Raghu dynasty."

"You say 'Raghu dynasty! Raghu dynasty'! Is your husband's Raghu dynasty greater than the Pulastya Brahma dynasty? Pulastya is the four among the six Prajapatis. Ravana is his grandson. This Lanka belonged to the ancestors of Ravana's *mother*. But the enemies had occupied it. After he was born and grew up, Ravana drove away his enemies, confiscated Lanka and earned fame. Is such a great man useless in your view?" Ekajata pressed her cheeks in surprise.[304]

"You say, 'My husband is very great. However great he may be, can he conquer our king and take you back? Why do you still have such futile hopes? For a woman like you, Ravana should be the husband. What Prahasa! Our king and Sita Devi make a very good match, don't they?"

"Oh, Why not! Sita is beautiful and Ravana is also handsome. If the two become wife and husband, Rati and Manmadha will feel envious."

"We have seen so many beautiful women around but I have never seen such a beautiful woman like Sita"

"Is it not for the same reason that the king has brought her here with great desire? Though Sita does not show him any mercy….."

"Sita! Heed our words. It is not a happy thing for us if you wail. All of us will feel happy seeing you go about comfortably, laughing and joyously. If you agree to Ravana's request he *will drown you in pleasures and wealth*."

"You do not know that I came to the forest life for the sake of my husband, abandoning all these pleasures and wealth."

"What pleasures and wealth did your husband have which you abandoned? We know all about you. Don't boast about yourself. After your husband left for the forest, who would have respected you even if you had lived in harems?"

"They say that your husband did not have even a cowry as property? They say he did not have the right to the kingdom? Why did your father arrange such a match for you?…. Shouldn't he have thought *about the good and bad* while *giving away* his *daughter in*

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[304] **Uttara kanda. From the beginning to sarga 15:** The summary of Ravana's background as part of history of the Rakshasas — Sumali was a Rakshasa. He built Lanka along with his brothers and lived there for some time. Enemies (that is other than Rakshasas) had occupied Lanka. All the Rakshasas left their country and took shelter here and there.

Visravasu — not a Rakshasa. Devavarnini is his wife. Kubera is his son. After the Rakshasas left Lanka Visravasu kept his son (Kubera) in Lanka. This means Visravasu belonged to the enemy camp of Rakshasas.

Sumali had a daughter called Kaikasi. Kaikasi married Visravasu with an intention to give birth to a great hero like Kubera. (*She could have married Kubera, couldn't she? .... Maybe she thought the old man would fondle her!*) Ravana was born to Kaikasi. Ravana and Kubera were brothers. The *mother*s were different. But Ravana became a Rakshasa. Why? Because his *mother*s belonged to the Rakshasa race. Kubera did not become Rakshasa. (*Again, Ravana's lineage was also that of his father!*)

After Rama grew up, Sumali (*his mother's father*) told his grand son, "Lanka is ours. Occupy it!" Ravana sent a word to Kubera, "Lanka belonged to the ancestors of my *mother*. Leave it and go away." Visravasu also told Kubera, "Ravana is a stupid fellow, a strong man. Leave Lanka." Kubera left Lanka. Since then Lanka has become the home for Rakshasas. *[All these are fights for places of residence!]*

By the time Ravana abducted Sita, Ravana's sons had also got married. ★

marriage?"

Sita got angry. "My father did not arrange this alliance. Brahma did it. My husband won me with his heroism in the bow competition", she looked at them with pride.

"Then Emperor Ravana too brought you with his heroism, didn't he?"

"It is not heroism. It is baseness. He brought me forcibly when my husband was not there."

"Well, would you have liked if he had waged battle with your husband and won you?"

"Devoted wives.... with only one husband... through out the life...." Sita turned away her face.

All of them felt disappointed and looked at each other's faces. "No use...." They *made signs with their eyes*.

"Who is responsible for whose past deeds?....She is not fortunate to become the wife of the Emperor Ravana. She thinks Rama is some god?" Vinata *waved* her *hands* sarcastically.

Ajumukhi, with a smiling face, went close to Sita and sat.... "Lass! Look at me once. All these days you have waited thinking that your husband would come and take you back. You have done whatever noble women do. How long will you suffer this detachment (*vairagyam*) from the worldly passions and ruin your life? Because we notice your good qualities, we are saying so much for your welfare. You have observed the customs of your race as long as you were under the control of your husband. Now there is no need to observe them. Marry our king and be a devoted wife to him. He will feel happy and you will also be happy. The king will leave Mandodari for your sake. All right? If you say, 'yes!', I will go right away and tell this to the king. You don't know how happy he will be..... Sita Devi! We will give you a bath with scented water. We will adorn you with ornaments of your choice. All your rival wives will serve you....."

"Have you never heard about devoted wives?" Sita looked at them angrily and in amazement.

"Why hear? We have already seen you?"

"Devoted wives believe that their husband is everything for them and.... along with the husband.... to the heaven...."

"Our king will show you all the heavenly pleasures here itself, won't he?..... The nectar that they drink in heaven.... gardens that they saunter about in the heaven.... here...."

"This is not heaven. It is a great hell for me"

"However much we say you don't give up your resolve. You don't give an ear to what we say. Your husband has no riches and wealth. What will you gain from him?"

"I do not expect riches and wealth. Serving at the feet of my husband itself is my great fortune."

"He wanders about in forests. What comfort do you get?"

"The forests that my husband wanders about in are like beautiful gardens for me."

"What sort of a woman is this? We don't know, in that country, there may be this sort of *wooden-headed women*....!"

"All the attendants *pressed their cheeks* in surprise.

"When will your husband come for you?"

"Poor fellow he couldn't come as he doesn't know the whereabouts of his wife. He will surely come as soon as *Aaakaasa Vaani* (voice of the sky) tell him"

"Why didn't 'voice of the sky' tell him of her whereabouts?"

"Even voice of the sky should know, aren't they?"

Unable to bear this ridicule, Sita's eyes filled up with tears.

"You are ridiculing me since you are fools. My husband will surely along with my brother-in-law to rescue me. The two brothers will never tolerate this insult. All of you, who are making me feel sad, will not be happy any longer. The *time has not yet pushed itself forward* for the total ruin of Lanka. I will not fail to see your husbands dying and you wailing as widows."

"In case, your husband dies?"

"*Hari! Hari!* (O god! O god!)" Sita closed her ears. "Why do you utter such sinful words? All of you can kill me. But I will not do as you say. Just as a Brahmin does not teach a chant to a Shudra, I will not give up my body to Ravana." Sita lowered her head.

"Sita! Don't shed tears, my lass! Our king will be upset. Think sensibly. Develop love for Ravana. See, how happily you can live later. Don't you know that the youth of a woman is not permanent?....You have uttered so many words so mercilessly!.... Because of his mercy and love for you he has tolerated it but wouldn't he have imposed the death sentence if it had been another just woman?"

"Hey, Chandodari! Why do you wait until the king imposes the death sentence? Let us kill Sita. The king will not say any thing to us. He will appreciate us saying that we did a good thing. Why do you beg her gently like that?.... It is all the craziness of our king, aren't there other more beautiful women than this one? To the eyes of a lustful person, even a monkey looks like Rambha, the celestial nymph. Otherwise, will he *seat her on the palanquin*, leaving all other wives behind?"

"Sita! You are not heeding us even if we tell you fondly. Finally, the *death sentence will be written for you*."

Sita's body trembled. The word 'death punishment' created some unintelligible repulsive feeling in Sita. The death punishment for a devoted wife?.... She had not heard this in any story! In all stories, devoted wives succeed at the end…. Sita in a fit of emotion, says, "Kill me! Kill me!" But when she imagines that they would really kill her, her emotion of a devoted wife recedes and she gets frightened like any ordinary woman.

Sita looks around. She hopes that 'suddenly some wonderful thing may happen' or somebody may some how come and rescue her. She is sighing, "I might have committed great sin in some birth?! I might have made a mistake in some of my daily worship! I might have given less charity in some religious ritual!.... It seems my *punya* is exhausted! That's why I have fallen in the hands of these wicked people. Who will save me?" Sita shed tears profusely.

Trijata who came just then sat near Sita. "Don't grieve, child! Whatever is written (*by fate*) will happen. Stop worrying. Last night I had a dream. You will feel happy when you hear it", she consoled Sita.

"What is it?" all people gathered around Trijata.

"Swans were carrying a white palanquin made of tusks. In it Sri Rama and Lakshmana arrived in Lanka in white garments. Sita climbed into the palanquin with a smiling face. Later Rama appeared to have sat astride an elephant. Then Sita too climbed the elephant. The elephant flew into the sky. Sita touched the sun and the moon with her hands up in the sky. Again Rama came on a bullock-cart along with Lakshmana. He took Sita with him and flew away in the Pushpak airplane. Well, I shall tell that how Ravana looked like?.... Oh! How frightening it is even to recollect! Black garments. Bare head. Garlands of *Ganneru* flowers. He was drinking oil. A woman pushed Ravana off from the airplane. He fell on to the earth. Again red garments. He was going in a chariot of donkeys. He fell off while going on it. As soon as he fell down, he rose up naked. He was smearing oil on himself. He spread out his hair. He was laughing. Shouting. He was drowned in stinking mud and a pit of a hell. Again a woman tied a rope to the neck of Ravana and was dragging him. I saw Kumbhakarna also in the same manner. I saw all the sons of Ravana too in the same condition. They appeared on pigs and camels.

But Vibhishana appeared with white garments and garlands, climbed the elephants and flew into the sky with the music of auspicious musical instruments playing.

All people lost themselves in intoxicating drinks and were dancing.

All the houses in Lanka collapsed. Horses and elephants died. A Vanara came and burnt down Lanka.

All the people smeared ashes on their bodies. Heroes among great heroes were in the pits of cattle shit. With dead animals, broken chariots and collapsed horses, Lanka was ruined and drowned in the sea."

Hearing Trijata's narration, unable to control her joy, Sita forgot her sorrow.

All the attendants were frightened and *turned into wood*.

"Sita is a great devoted wife. Let us not harass her. We have to beg her pardon for all our wrongs. Let us leave Sita and go away. Let her be comfortable." Looking at Sita with reverence they went away to a distance.[305]

Roaming under the trees, Sita was lost in her thoughts. The joy that she felt while listening to Trijata's dream slowly vanished. These maid servants have been trying to delude me and win my favour. Today they narrate one dream and another tomorrow.

Trijata has a lot of reverence for me. And she is kind to me. Yet, she is also an attendant of Ravana's! I can't believe the words and deeds of these wicked people. Why doesn't some such good omen appear to me? Are dreams too hostile for me?

For Sita who was lonely, *grief rose like a tidal wave in the sea*. What is the use although I live in the midst of these enemies? Has Sri Rama forgotten me? Has he abandoned me thinking that he does not want a woman whom another man has abducted?... Going to Ayodhya.... is he happy with many other beautiful damsels? Does he speak outwardly loving words when I am in front of him and can't he be merciful when I am entangled in danger? Can Sri Rama, in fact, conquer Ravana single handled?.... Alas! Why does my heart doubt so much? He might be in some sort of sorrow! My husband has difficulties due to me and he has no happiness.[306]

Staying in the captivity of these wicked people, how long can I retain my devotion to my husband? My hope that Rama will come is perishing.

The elders say, 'suicide is a great sin'. This body has no strength even to give up its life. Can't devoted wives wish for death whenever they want it? Devotion to the husband, vows, worship — are all these futile? All these days, I have been away from my husband in the house of an other man. Am I a devoted wife? Ugh! Why should I have this body?.... Not able to get an idea how to hang myself!.... Alas!....Why does my heart remain unbroken even in this grief!....Why this birth.....?"

"*Mother*!....Sita Devi!....don't grieve, *mother*!" — Some voice! With kindness and *reverence*.

Sita looked around in surprise.

"Don't fear, *mother*! I am not an enemy. Your husband has sent me. I had hidden myself the whole night on this tree."[307]

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305. Sundara kanda, sarga 27: Though Trijata was an attendant of Ravana, we can assume that she belonged to Vibhishana's group. ★

306. Sundara kanda, sarga 36, sloka 20 and sarga 26, sloka 18: "As I am away in a different country, has Rama given up his love for me?" — Sita.

"Rama — who has great valour — cannot rescue his wife. What must the reason for this be? I doubt that Rama does not know that I am here. If he knew, will Rama — who is illustrious — keep quiet? He will get angry and see that no Rakshasa survives in this world by using his arrows. He will destroy the city of Lanka. He will dry up the seas" — Sita. ★

307. Sundara kanda, sarga 30, sloka 12 and sarga 33, sloka 2: Hanuman came at night and sat on the tree, hadn't he?.... Ravana came early in the morning, didn't he? But, Hanuman thinks as if the same night continued. "If I don't talk to Sita before sunrise and convince her, she will sacrifice her life", thinks Hanuman. Further, "He found time to speak to Sita while the Rakshasa-women were sleeping. One can think that he waited till the second night. But such logic does not find place in religious literature. The logic keeps changing as the situation in the story demands!

Hanuman had to search for Asoka vana — so it is night.

Ravana had to talk to Sita — so it is day.

If Hanuman wants to talk to Sita, all the maidservants had to go to sleep — so it is again night. If necessary it will be after noon. ★

With amazement, Sita raised her head and looked. She hesitated out of fear. She tried to go away.

"*Mother*! Believe me! Your husband has sent me. I know all your details. King Janaka is your father. King Dasaratha is your father-in-law. Kausalya is your *mother*-in-law. Sri Ramachandra is your husband. Abiding his father's words your husband came to the forests. When you were in Dandakaranya, seeing you alone, this wicked man abducted you. I know every thing!.... That's why I have come searching for you."

Sita *was drowned in wonder*. What am I seeing… What am I hearing?.... Am I dreaming?.... Am I under an illusion?.... Have I gone mad? Preoccupied with the same thoughts daily, am I seeing the same thing? With fasting, fatigue and delirium…. am I creating all this for myself?.... But hallucination has no shape! Imagination cannot assume any form!.... I can see a man so clearly. I hear the words so clearly. I am experiencing things with my sensory organs!.... It is very surprising!....[308]

What is surprising in this? Here the guards both women and men try to mislead us. They slowly start speaking about Rama and bring in the sermons about Ravana. I wouldn't believe such people.

Hanuman has already got down from the tree and is in front of Sita obediently.

"*Mother*! Your husband is anxiously waiting for you."

Sita is unable to believe her ears. "Is my husband anxiously looking for me?" She looked in all sides eagerly.

"My name is Hanuman, *mother*!...We are Vanaras. Our country is Kishkindha. I am working as a minister under king Sugriva. Our king is a good friend of your husband. Listen to my words completely. Don't grieve. These wicked fellows will get their due punishment…Your husband has not come here. He is in our kingdom.

As soon as I return and tell him about you, he will come here with a great army and fight a battle against these wicked people"

"With the army?.... Where is the army? Can I believe your words?"

"Alas! Please believe me, *mother*!...Your husband came to Kishkindha and made friends with our king. Our king is a very good man. He will give his army to your husband and help him. Sri Rama will definitely come here, fight the battle, kill all these vile fellows and take you back"

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308. Sundara kanda, sarga 32, sloka 11: On seeing Hanuman, Sita could not believe it and thought very logically. 'I always think of Rama. That's why I may be hearing about him', she thought. She says, "Meditating about Rama at all times and in all conditions, I recite Rama's name. Now I am hearing the story in the concrete form in conformity with the recitation of Rama's name. I am able to see it. Now, I am concentrating all my thoughts on Rama, meditating about him and seeing him" (*Here it is Rama whom she sees!*) The point here is that one can see the shape of a person if she concentrates on that person *only*. Then all the devotees who 'see' 'god' are also of this type, aren't they?

Again, Sita's doubt. "The wish of the heart does not have any shape, doesn't it?" How scientific is this? This is connected with 'rationalism'! Why is the poet resorting to such rationalism? Because it is necessary here. Because, Sita has to believe that Hanuman is a real 'human' being. If she simply thinks, "It is my hallucination that I see Hanuman", things won't work. Therefore she has to think, "How is it that I see my hallucination… It is not a hallucination that I see. It is a fact." See another point. She is thinking, "Is this an illusion that is caused due to a delirium due to my fasting?" The poet admits the fact that fasting results in delirium. Will he accept this point at any other time? When he talks about some sage, the poet would say, "This gentleman gave up sleep and food for ten years and he attained great miraculous power." Then, 'delirium' *puts a blank face* as it could not catch that sage. An argument that suits the poet's need! ★

"As I hear you, I am *regaining my lost life*....But...."[309]

"Do not have any doubt, *mother*!.... I have come searching for you. Your husband told me all your identification marks. I was sure you were Sri Rama's wife as soon as I saw you"

"You seem to be a tribal man. You say that my husband and your king have become friends. You also say my husband is in your kingdom."

"I'll tell you all that, *mother*! Your husband and brother-in-law, while searching for you, roamed around the forest and finally came to Rishyamuka mountain near our country. At that time, our king had quarrelled with his brother and was staying on that mountain. The name of the elder brother of our king was Vali. He was an utter vile fellow! He harassed his own brother in many ways."

"All right! Then what happened? Tell me quickly, my *lad*!"

"Our king hesitated out of fear on seeing your husband. He called me and asked me to find out who they were. I went to your husband, found out everything about them and took both the brothers to our king. Our king and your husband talked about '*good and bad things*'. Both said, '*All right! All right*!'. They came to an agreement in the presence of fire as witness to help each other. At that time, we showed to your husband the bundle of jewels that you had thrown on your way. All your jewels are intact. *If it is truly our wealth, we get it back*!"

"Tell me quickly, my *lad*! What happened after my husband made an agreement with your king?"

"By the grace of your husband, our king got back his kingdom...Haven't I told you that our king's brother was an utter wicked man? He was enjoying his brother's wife and had banished him from the country. Hearing this, your husband said he wouldn't allow injustice anywhere and killed Vali with an arrow and handed over the kingdom and his wife to our king."

"Ah! What a man of justice!" Sita's heart filled with joy.

"Your husband gave such help! Could our king accept help and not do anything in return?.... Our king is making all the arrangements to wage a battle against this vile man.... He has sent many soldiers to all kingdoms to trace your whereabouts. We could not find out about your whereabouts for a long time. Finally, a man called Sampati..... I don't know how he had heard about you.... he told us that you were in Lanka. When a king kidnapped another man's woman, can that news remain without *spreading from one mouth to another*. It is my fortune that I could see you.... If I tell this news, on your husband will come here on wings."

All the words of Hanuman appeared to be believable to Sita. Still, she had doubts. "Hanuman! You said you saw my husband. Tell me his features. Tell me whether he is dark or fair. Tell me his qualities. I will be happy to hear it", said Sita eagerly.

"Oh, what dearth is there in your husband?.... His *nose and face* are so attractive that we feel like looking at it again and again.... It seems your mother-in-law is very beautiful....." Hanuman looked for a place and squatted there.

Remembering the maids Sita said with alarm, "Somebody may see you! It is better if you sit behind that bush and talk." She looked around.

Without moving, Hanuman said, "Let them see me.... It doesn't matter. I will catch hold of each one of them and give them a good thrashing. *They will speak about it wherever they want*. I had thought of beating to death all those who had gathered round you but hesitated as my job would be spoiled....." He looked around angrily and sat down adjusting himself.

Still frightened, Sita requested him, "Heed my words!.... Any way, it is better. It will be dangerous if they see you. Sit behind the bush

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309. Why doesn't he show that ring?.... He might have lost it somewhere! Shouldn't he show it as soon as he came? Alas! What sort of man he is! Guess why he had not shown as soon as he arrived. ★

of *Gurivinda*. As I walk here, I will talk to you."

Hanuman was obliged to get up. "Don't worry about me!.... I am thoroughly acquainted with these hills and valleys. If any body sees me.... I can escape in the blink of an eye," said Hanuman and went into the bushes and sat there.

Holding the branch of a nearby *Modugu* tree, Sita stood there. "Hanuman! My heart is very eager to hear your words. Tell me all things at once. What is my husband doing? What is my brother-in-law doing? Where are they staying?..... How are they living?.... You have really seen them, haven't you?"

"Your husband is also grieving like this. *No stop to his mouth which utters*, 'Sita! Sita!' While such a big man wets his eyes.... what can we do? The heart of the onlookers melts. He is a very great man both for handsomeness and for quality. He helps those who seek refuge in him. He is very particular about traditions. He does not sleep until he burns to ashes those whom he does not like. His revenge is like a Cobra's. He doesn't at all like the mixing of castes. He says, 'Elders introduced them a long time ago and they must continue!' He does not have even an iota of craze for women. Why should I lie.... he does not lift his eyes and look at any other woman. He gives his life to ascetics and sages. He has a lot of respect for Brahmins.... He doesn't leave their feet without touching them with his eyes. If he opens his mouth, he cannot restrain himself without quoting from the scriptures. Oh!... He is so wise that his *belly is full of education*. He says one should earn a lot and donate a lot. He knows pretty well what kind of worship one needs to perform, what kind of vow one has to observe and when. He bathes three times a day, performs worship. If he talks about royal matters? Can any one else open their mouth? He is like an ascetic because he abides by his father's word... Otherwise he alone can rule the entire world. One has to see how he holds that bow. He can shoot even a *black bead* which is eight miles away and break it into ten pieces. He is very fond of hunting. *Once he starts it he will not be a man*. Until he becomes breathless, he goes on shooting either a crow or an eagle. He has only this much..... Any way, the craziness for hunting exists among kings. Your *hubby* doesn't have a single bad habit. He doesn't smoke even a cigar. He is very good man. If any one comes close to him rolling tobacco into a cigar, he frowns and says irritably, 'stand at a distance!'

Sita's heart was swinging with joy. Forgetting herself, she listened to Hanuman with a smile. "Tell me about his physical features", she asked.

"I have already told you, *mother*!....He is very good looking in appearance. He is unique. You are unique.[310] Do I know how to describe? Nay... If it were the teacher in our village, he could have described your *hubby* graphically.... His eyes are a hand's breadth... That nose... that face... Never knew what labour is! Not even a single vein is visible on his legs or hands. Never does he sweat. His body appears smooth and shining. If we touch it, it may get spoiled. *If a fly lands on his body, it loses its grip and falls off quickly*. He never keeps beard or moustache. He doesn't have hair on his body. His palms look like red flowers. His nails look white, as white as a Jasmine. His back is handsome, broad like a raft. At his shoulders or on the chest…. not even a single bone can be seen. Lips are thick. The nose is somewhat big. His belly is a little bit high!....." Hanuman continued his narration.

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[310] **Sundara kanda, sarga 33, slokas 6, 9 & 11:** See Hanuman's words while addressing Sita. "O woman with beautiful buttocks!" (vararohe); "O woman with beautiful waist!" (sumadhyame); "Based on the features of your breasts and buttocks etc...." (vyanjananichate yani lakshanani) — This is how it went on. Here also the poet struggled for rhyme in poetry. True, that there ought to be rhyme and rhythm in poetry. Otherwise, it cannot be called poetry. But, the words used must be appropriate to the nature of the given characters and the contexts. If Hanuman also addresses Sita, "O woman with beautiful buttocks! O woman with beautiful breasts!" then where is the appropriateness in the portrayal of characters? He could have used the words like 'sushile', 'gunavate' or some such words, couldn't he? The poet possesses adequate diction, doesn't he? But, we find 'breasts and buttocks' even when Hanuman describes Sita! ★

Sita has full confidence. She listened to him with uncontrollable joy.

"Now about your brother-in-law?.... Since I have described the elder brother, it is not necessary to talk about the younger brother. Similar noses… similar faces…. But his hands are somewhat hard. He has no belly. Why use so many words…Your hubby is unique.[311]

Sita understood that Hanuman has lot a of reverence for her husband. She felt happy that Hanuman was trustworthy. "Hanuman! While I hear your words, I feel as if showers of rain have fallen on dry and cracked land! What pleasant news I have heard after a long time! You have saved my life. *Live happily for a thousand years so that your mother's belly is cool*. As soon as I saw you, I thought differently about you…. You are not an ordinary man. A great courageous man. Entering this Asoka vana is *like putting* your *head into the lion's mouth*. Since my husband grasped your boldness and courage, he engaged you for this task…. Tell me all the details about yourself…. Who your parents are….. What is your caste and lineage?"

While Sita was praising him, Hanuman felt a little shy. He narrated his life history to her. When my father went out of the country, I was born to a man called Vayu."[312]

Suddenly, remembering some thing, Hanuman took out a ring from his navel. "Oh, All this while I forgot about this. Take this. Your husband gave this to me to show it to you. He said you would believe me if you saw this. Damn my absent mindedness. I forgot." He bent toward Sita from the bush and put the ring in her hand.[313]

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311. Sundara kanda, sarga 35, slokas 9 to 22: In the context where Hanuman describes Rama in the presence of Sita, Hanuman made an extraordinary description. In this description, the poet did not make things clear. "A man who possessed three stiff limbs, three reddish, three long and fourteen of equal size…." This is the way he described. Three red limbs mean — what are they? Palms, soles of the feet and rims of his eyes. Three stiff limbs mean? Chest, arm and fist. 'A man who had four kinds of gait' means, Gait of a lion, a tiger, an elephant and a bull! Thus, the translators elaborated what the poet had said vaguely. However, the translators expressed the same view.

All scholars have identical views with regard to *Sapta Rishi* (seven sages), *Nava graha* (nine planets), *Ekadasa Rudrulu* (Eleven Rudras), haven't they? Similarly, with regard to the features of Rama also. In the elaborated descriptions, there are some strange things.

Rama has four parts that are of equal size: ends of hair, knees, and testicles. He has feet that do not show sweat and nerves. He has only one hair in one pore of the skin. He has three curlings in his head. He has four large teeth on each side. He is eight feet long. He has a *lingam* (penis)not very long. — This is how the description went on! How did Hanuman see Rama's penis and testicles? Moreover, he is telling about them to Sita! ★

312. Sundara kanda, sarga 35m sloka 89: See, for what reason Hanuman was born to Vayudeva. "When my father Kesari went out of the country after killing a Rakshasa called Sambanana on the command of celestial sages, I was born by the grace of Vayudeva." (*When Vayudeva came here, who was born to Vayu's wife and by whose grace?*) ★

313. The reason for Hanuman not giving the ring to Sita as soon as he saw her is not that he had forgotten about the ring. If he had given the ring at the beginning itself and if Sita had believed him, there would not be an opportunity to narrate in several sargas — about Sita's fear and doubts, beautiful scenes of Hanuman's description of Sri Ramachandra. That is why the poet did not make Hanuman give the ring at the beginning itself. However, Sita could have asked Hanuman to tell about her husband, even if he had given the ring at the beginning. ★

Seeing the ring, Sita recognized the ring. It was her husband's! Her eyes welled up with tears. "All these days, has my husband forgotten me?.... Has he remembered me only now? Not one day or two days but ten months have passed since this wicked fellow captured me. Didn't Sri Rama have the thought about the hardships I faced? Since our marriage, have I ever stayed away from my husband? For twelve years, I spent my married life in Ayodhya, enjoying royal pleasures. Later, I lived with my husband thinking forest life too was great joy. Has my husband forgotten such a wife?" She shed tears profusely.

"Don't say so, *mother*! There hasn't been a single day when your husband does not remember you and worry.... Till recently it was the rainy season! Our king is a bit careless. He spent all the days saying, "We'll do it today, we'll do it tomorrow'. That is why, finally your husband got angry and reprimanded him, 'Tell me first whether you will search for my wife or not'. Then our king felt ashamed, realized his mistake and sent all of us to various kingdoms to look for you. Poor man, what could your husband do alone? It is not an easy task. It needs a fighting force."

Sita lowered her head with dissatisfaction and lost in thought. "Can't my husband rescue me without the help of others? Does such a valorous man need others' help? What would have happened if he had not made friends with Sugriva?.... Would my life have to end in this Lanka?"

"Don't grieve, *mother*! It won't take very long now. As soon as I go and convey this news, your husband will come with the Vanara army, fight the battle against Ravana...."

"Battle?.... Against Ravana?... Alas! God determines success and failures.. We don't know what will happen in the end"

"Yes, god determines success and failures... but that god is under our control! Justice is ours.... It is inevitable that the wicked fellow who kidnapped another man's woman will perish."

Sita too felt it was right. She felt a bit relieved. "Yes! The wicked has to perish. Ravana's brother Vibhishana is a great man. I have heard that Vibhishana prayed to his brother to take me back to my husband. Vibhishana's daughter, Anala, occasionally comes to me and tells me secretly about her father. Vibhishana's wife sends her daughter to me. — Who can teach him justice, this wicked man has no sense. Only death will give him sense."

"Yes, *mother*! It will happen that way."

Sita sighed. "Hanuman! Is my husband happy?.... Has he not become bony, unable to withstand the grief at my absence?"

"He wailed when he saw your jewels. He always remembers you and his eyes well up with tears. Tell me, how can a man express his sorrow more than that? He is *hiding his sorrow in the stomach*. It is a life in the forest! What comforts does he have? Lost in thoughts about you, he does not even pay attention to insects if they crawl on him."[314]

"Yes. For my husband, I am like his life. He loves me more than his mother and father. God has cruelly separated us. My heart feels very happy to know that my husband is grieving for me. However, I cannot bear to see that he spends his time in sorrow. We don't know when we will live together again happily and what will our destiny be." Sita sighed.

Hanuman also felt worried. Recovering after some time, he said, "More than your husband, your brother-in-law is very worried about your whereabouts. That great man is sad about you as well as for his brother." Hanuman expressed his sorrow.

"Yes. My brother-in-law is a very good man. For him 'serving the elder brother' is the absolute duty. He is worthy of praise even from gods." Sita's eyes were tearful.

"If we look at those brothers, all our sins will vanish. Your brother-in-law is always seen

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314. Sundara kanda, sarga 36, sloka 42: Drowned in the grief over Sita, Rama does not pay any attention even if snakes crawl on his body. "Concentrating his mind on you, Sri Rama does not drive away forest flies, mosquitoes, insects and snakes even if they trouble him". This is a kind of cupid state of mind, they say! Cupid-state of mind or stupid-state of mind! ★

serving his elder brother. He serves his elder brother like an infant child.

Sita sighed. "He is obliged to face hardships because of us. Leaving behind many loves and all pleasures, he came to the forests out of reverence for his brother. He follows his brother's command as if the word were Veda. I grieve why at least Lakshmana did not rescue me."

"Alas! All attempts are being made to rescue you. Don't grieve! Now you can live without fear."

After waiting a while, Sita asked, "Hanuman! Have you heard any news about Kosala? My mother-in-law, my younger mothers-in-law and Bharata — are all of them well? Will Bharata send armies to fight against this wicked man?"[315]

"Such news has *not fallen on my ears, mother*! For the sake of battle, Vanara armies are adequate. Our king can send any number of people to battle. No doubt about it."

"Initially Ravana gave me one year's time. Now only two months are left. Will the battle be over before this time?....Will my husband rescue me?"

Hanuman was lost in thought. 'Will the battle be over in two months? Will Ravana die?... Anyway, will this wicked man keep his word and wait up to two months?....This is not believable. "*Mother*! It seems it is not safe to leave you here amidst these wicked people... Anyway, I have come here. I will take you along with me carefully. I will hide again on the tree until the night. After all people go to sleep, we will go along the hills of this side. If we escape some distance, we can somehow escape later. What do you say?" said Hanuman.

Sita felt like going at once. She felt happy. "Yes, it will be nice if I can go with Hanuman", said *Sita within Sita*, eagerly.

Sita was lost in thoughts. "Is it proper to go along with Hanuman? In many stories, husbands alone rescued their devoted wives and took them back. Indra alone rescued Sachi Devi. It is the duty of the husband to protect and rule the wife. A devoted wife ought not to request men other than her husband for any help. What a fame there will be if Sri Rama comes along with armies, kills the enemy and takes me in his chariot! The world praises my husband as a great hero. It will also praise me as a great, devoted wife.... This is how it should...."

"Yes, yes....Then, this wicked man?" — *Sita within Sita*.

"He is not very wicked, isn't he?.... What fame if my husband alone rescues me!"

"All right! As you please!...."

"What *mother*?" — Hanuman.

"Hanuman! It is not proper for me to come along with you. I came under the control of Ravana as I had no strength to escape. I will not go with another man. It is the custom of the world that my husband should rescue me and take me along with him."

Sita's words sounded somewhat strange to Hanuman. "It is not so, *Mother*. We don't know what dreadful act this wicked fellow may commit... if you first escape from this man.... afterwards your husband will come and finish him off. Why will he let this man off?"

Sita turned her head unwillingly. "Ravana treats me somewhat kindly. Had he intended to, he would have killed me by now... Going with you.... not good from any point of view. They guard this place at all points. If we are caught, they will kill both of us. Or they will kill you and hand me over to Ravana again.... then they will take me away and hide me somewhere. If I think about it, I see only hurdles. It is better if you go back quickly and make arrangements for my husband's arrival. Why waste so many

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315. Sundara kanda, sarga 36, slokas 22 to 24: "Kausalya, Sumitra, Bharata.... Does my husband enquire about the welfare of these people?" She never asked about Kaika. All right! However, she did not ask about Satrughna either. Always the name of Bharata. She refers to Lakshmana only because he does the drudgery. What was the reason for paying special attention to Bharata which she had not shown to Satrughna?.... Because he had power. "Will Bharata who loves his brother send the army for my sake?" asked Sita. Whether he will send or not let us see at the time of the battle.

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words?.... It is not a matter of honour for me to go with a man other than my husband."[316]

"All right, *mother*!.... What you said is also true. People are like crows.... They hurl any number of accusations.... I have never seen a noble woman like you. Except you... there isn't such a good-natured woman in the world. You are a great, devoted wife. Difficulties have befallen you!"

Sita went into ecstasy. After her husband rescues and takes her back.... how many more people... praise her in many ways!.... Brahmins, sages, scholars, elders, priests.... In fact, the abduction by Ravana itself is a great fame. The truth that she did not desire another man will be evident to her husband and the world too will appreciate it.

"*Mother*!.... I will tell your husband all that you have said. Do you want me to tell him anything more?"

"Alas! Are you going now?"

"All right, I will not go!.... I will go only when you command me. If you tell me every thing you want me to tell your husband...."

"What shall I say? You, yourself, have seen everything. Explain my plight. Tell him that I have retained my life for the sake of Sri Rama only....When we stayed in Chitrakuta, once, I was lying down with my head *on the thigh* of my husband. Then a forest crow came and pecked at me. To chase it away, I was about to remove my cestus. My husband got very angry at the crow and shot an arrow. Remind him of this incident. Tell him that I always feel sorry why he — who punished even a crow — has spared this wicked man."[317]

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316. Sundara kanda, sarga 37, sloka 29: In Valmiki *Ramayana*, Hanuman is a monkey, isn't he? He says he would carry Sita on his back. Then Sita ridicules him, "How can you carry me for such a long distance? I think this is your monkey's mentality". Receiving help from that monkey, making it do things for them and ridiculing! Then how does a Vanara — who does heroic acts — have a monkey's mentality? This is an attitude of a society that treats servants carelessly and contemptuously. For Sita's sake, who ridiculed him, Hanuman expands his body in Asoka vana and exhibits a gigantic form. How bold the poet is!

"How will Rama and Lakshmana come to Lanka?" asks Sita. "Sitting on my back, the best among men — Rama and Lakshmana — will come to you!" said Hanuman.

Sita did not say, "How can you get them? It is your monkey mentality". Because their arrival was very necessary; wasn't it? (*Or, she might have thought, "If they fall in the sea, let them!"*)★

317. Sundara kanda, sarga 38, slokas 15 to 40:

This is the episode of Kakasura, which Sita asked Hanuman to tell Rama. "In the forest, I was relaxing on the thigh of Rama. Then a crow, desirous of my flesh, pecked in the middle of my breasts. (*Where did it peck, Mr. poet-sir? In the middle of breasts? Yes sir. It is the only place, which you see.*) I threw a small earth stone at it. But, it continued to peck at my breasts, hiding. Then, I tried to take out my cestus. My upper garment slipped. Rama laughed. I felt shy and got annoyed. Later, I continued my annoyance, lying on Sri Rama's thigh. Again, Sri Ram slept on my thigh. Again, that crow pecked in the middle of my breasts. It flew high and pecked me repeatedly. (*The poet himself assumed the form of a crow and does not let go off the breasts of Sita!*) Drops of blood trickled from my breasts and Rama's body got wet. Due to the torture of the crow, I woke Sri Rama up from his sleep. Sri Rama woke up and was infuriated and hissed, "Oh, lady with thighs that resemble the trunk of an elephant! Which wicked fellow pecked you in the middle of your breasts?" Seeing the crow that stood with nails wet with blood, Rama angrily took some blades of sacred grass, chanted the mantra and threw *Brahma weapon*. It chased the crow in all the three worlds. The crow roamed the three worlds for nine times and finally fell on the feet of Rama as it did not find any one who could save it. The Brahma weapon, due to the mercy of Rama, destroyed only the right eye of the crow and saved its life" — Sita asked Hanuman to remind him of this sweet memory. People say 'Brahma weapon on a sparrow! So, Brahma weapon on a crow! Why didn't he throw it on Ravana?

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"This wicked man is not a crow, *mother*! Around this fellow, there are many people, army…."

Once when the mark on my forehead was erased, he rubbed a red stone and put a mark on my forehead. Remind him of this incident also. Ask him whether he — who put a mark on my forehead — will keep me alive or not. Hanuman! If I recall all the past days, I wonder if it is Sri Rama who has ignored me so much. He used to say, "I have to protect those in danger'! Does he have love for this wife, who is far away? If he has love for me, can't he rescue me? I know the valour of my husband. He does not perturb to any hardship. Never does he feel disappointed. Despite being a great powerful man, he has no mercy on me…. will he at least now have me released from this custody?" She shed tears profusely.

"Don't be upset, *mother*! Your husband is making preparation for the battle only to rescue you. He does not forget you even in his sleep. I have been watching… his grief… your brother-in-law consoling him. Believe my words… you should not have tears in your eyes. It will not take long now."

"Hanuman! How soothingly you speak! You alone will have to rid me of my grief. You alone should see that I reach the feet of my husband! I don't know how you will tell my husband and how you will enable me to get out of this sea of sorrow. My husband is so efficient that he can rule the entire world. You have to remind him that it is his duty to eliminate the enemy and rescue his wife. Tell my husband how these vile people here harass me. I will live only for a month, beginning from today. My husband should himself come personally, terrorize the whole Lanka and take me away. Hanuman! Only due to your words, my husband should get a sense of manliness that he should get me back." [318]

"All right, *mother*! I will surely tell him. I will tell him what ever I have seen here. There won't be any paucity of words. But, you must have courage in the meanwhile."

She took out an ornament, which she had tied at the upper end of her garment. "Give this *Chudamani* (diadem) to my husband. He will definitely believe that you met me. He will feel happy. Don't forget! Give it to him as soon as you reach"

"All right! This time, I will give this as soon as I reach" Hanuman took the ornament.

Sita's eyes were filled with tears. "Stay here this night as well. The sense of your presence gives me a lot of courage. So far, I have been consoled a lot. I will wait with so many eyes from the time you leave until you return! I do not know whether I will survive. It is my bad luck that my husband has not yet rescued me although he is a valorous person. Unless I suffer because of my sin totally, my husband will not be kind to rescue me."

"No *mother*! I too cannot leave you if you grieve so much. Believe my word. Your husband is a valorous man. He will surely rescue you from this imprisonment. Permit me to leave. I will go happily and pass on this news to your husband."

"All right, *lad*!... Salute the feet of my husband as I have done. Tell my brother-in-law that I have enquired about his welfare. Tell king Sugriva and all his ministers that I have enquired about them….."

The words of maids are heard at a distance.

Quickly, Sita walked towards another tree.

"Tell him I will live for one month only……", she said from a distance. ★

[Translation: **B.R. Bapuji**]

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318. **Sundara kanda, sarga 39, slokas 9 to 12:** Sita is begging Hanuman to tell Rama that he should somehow rescue her from these hardships. "Hanuman! Tell Rama so that he will help me live. Get *punya* by doing this. On hearing your words, Rama will improve his enthusiasm and manliness. Only on listening to your words, Rama will show his valour against the enemies." ★

Link-7

Between the 9th Story and the 10th Story

[The **9th** story ended with Hanuman leaving *Asoka vana* after talking to Sita. The **10th** story begins with Hanuman going to Rishyamuka and telling Rama about Sita. This is the Link between the two stories.]

The task for which Hanuman came to Lanka ended smoothly. "Let me know the strengths and weaknesses of these Rakshasas", thought Hanuman. "Any way, I will provoke these people. I will see that battle becomes inevitable." He also thought, however big an army may attack a hero like me, it will be destroyed completely."[319]

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[319] **Sundara kanda, sarga 30, slokas 20 to 40:** Hanuman met Sita. Talked to her. The job for which he came was done. Now he was thinking of fighting with the people in Lanka. Before this thought of fighting, what were his thoughts? This we should know. Before he entered Asoka vana, he hid on the tree and talked to Sita, he thought about how to behave in Lanka, what care he had to take and how to avoid certain risks. "These Rakshasa-women will catch me or kill me if they see me. If Rakshasas corner me and if I have to fight with them, I will not be able to cross the sea later due to that exertion. Then Sri Rama will not get any information about Sita. The Rakshasas may kill Sita. If they kill me or take me as hostage, there will be no one who can cross the sea and carry on the task of Sri Rama. However much I think, I do not see any other Vanara who can cross this sea, if I die.... Success and failures in battle will be uncertain. A sensible person does not get involved in doubtful activities. Arrogant messengers spoil good tasks." — Hanuman, who wanted to be a sensible messenger, now wants to pick up a quarrel.

Sarga 37, slokas 47 to 57: See what Sita told Hanuman when he said, "I will sit you on my back and carry you." Sita tells him what dangers will befall if their attempts to escape reveal themselves. "On seeing me, the Rakshasas will chase us. Danger may befall you while rescuing me. There is no doubt about it. Rakshasas will take me to Ravana. Or slay me. Or take me to a secret place which Vanaras, Rama and Lakshmana will not know about it. Then all the attempts of Sri Rama will be wasted. Success and failures are doubtful. It is not possible to assure success and failure before hand." — The poet argued so in these two contexts. Now, see how he is arguing in favour of fighting with the Rakshasas and burning Lanka.

Sarga 41, up to sloka 13: "When a messenger — who had been sent to do a job — attempts to do several jobs, he must see that the first task is not spoiled. (*Can Hanuman assure before hand that because of the present proposed action, his first action will not get spoiled and Ravana will not get Sita killed?*) An efficient man is one who accomplishes a task through several means.... In the case of finding out the strength and weakness of these Rakshasas, the tactic of use of force alone is the means. In a battle, if some warriors die, the remaining will surrender.... Hence, I will confront Ravana who is accompanied by his ministers and armies and find out his strength and travel from here comfortably. I, who possess valour that is impossible to defeat, will confront the Rakshasas who possess terrifying valour... kill their armies... go to Kishkindha." — This is ➔

After thinking so, Hanuman began to uproot all the trees in Asoka vana. He uprooted great trees. He pounded the rocks into powder. He tore away wells and lakes. He bulldozed all the mansions.

Birds covered the entire sky and cried for help. Big lions ran out of the caves. Hearing sounds of destruction from Asoka vana, all the people in Lanka trembled with fear.

Except the place where Sita was, Hanuman destroyed every thing and sat on the wall near the main entrance. The Rakshasa-women sleeping near Sita woke up. (*Oh! What a* ***rocky sleep***!) They saw the destroyed Asoka vana. They saw the monkey that sat on the gate. They gathered round Sita and asked her, "Who is that Vanara? Why did you talk to him?"

"What do I know? I also fear him like you do. You know about your Rakshasas."

Some maidservants went to Ravana. "Some Vanara came, talked to Sita and he is still there. He has destroyed the entire garden except where Sita is. Though we asked Sita about him, she does not tell us anything", they said.

Ravana got infuriated and sent 80 thousand warriors. All of them picked up iron pestles, broad swords, spears, clubs and arrows, surrounded Hanuman and began to throw the weapons at him.

Expanding his body, Hanuman roared frightfully. "Victory to Sri Rama and Lakshmana! Victory to king Sugriva! I am Hanuman! Son of Vayu! I will completely destroy Lanka! I will take leave of Sita Devi and return safely." All the birds, due to the shock of such thunderous roars, fell down like wilted flowers.

Pulling out the iron bolt of the door at the main gate, Hanuman jumped into the sky holding that bolt. *(So, however miraculous one may be, he cannot do anything with bare hands! He must possess some 'weapon'!)*

Ferocious battle took place between Hanuman and 80 thousand soldiers. Hanuman killed all the 80 thousand soldiers. *(Poet-sir! It would have been better if it were a lakh soldiers! Why have you decreased the number a little? It seems, in your sloka, you got the word, '****teeshaamasitisaahasram****').* Hanuman killed all of them, climbed the arch, and sat on it.

Hearing that army was killed, Ravana became furious and asked Jambumalini, the son of his minister Prahasta to go and fight.

Meanwhile, Hanuman remembered *Chaitya prasada.* [320]

"Why have I left it undemolished?" he thought and took a stride from the gate to that mansion. He shook and shook its top and broke the entire mansion. "Victory to Sri Ramachandra! Victory to Sugriva! I will pound even a thousand Ravanas", he shouted. [321]

➔ how Hanuman's argument has changed! First he thought, if he fought, his strength would diminish and he would not be able to go back. In such an event, he thought the Rakshasas would either kill Sita, hide somewhere else or he himself might get defeated.... where have these arguments gone? See, as you go further in the story! See how many things he did that cause risk to Sita. This poet uses logic that suits a given scene! One kind of logic there, one here! With his logic of convenience, the poet can *hold a particular parasol to a particular kind of sun*! ★

320. Mr. Gattupalli Seshacharyulu translated 'Chaitya prasada' as 'temple'. Some scholars call it a 'mansion'. ★

321. In fact, Hanuman had come as a spy. He was expected to move about secretly and if had wanted to do any other thing after he had finished the original task, he ought to have done it secretly. If he was not a spy but a messenger, he ought to have met Ravana directly. Hanuman did not fall under any of these categories. He claimed himself to be the messenger of Rama. Without any secrecy, he said that he had spoken to Sita. Then why did Sita conceal this fact when the woman-guards asked her? This means, Sita viewed it as some thing that should be kept a ➔

A hundred people who were guarding the mansion threw weapons at Hanuman. Picking up a collapsed post there, Hanuman beat them to death and roamed about with that post in his hand rotating it speedily. The post hit the stones and it caught fire. The Chaitya mansion burnt down completely because of that fire.

By then Jambumali arrived on a donkeys' chariot with weapons for the battle. As soon as he came, he showered arrows on Hanuman.

Hanuman lifted a big boulder and threw it onto Jambumali. Jambumali powdered it with his arrows.

Hanuman uprooted a huge *Maddi* tree, rotated it swiftly and hit Jambumali. Jambumali tore it into tiny pieces.

Hanuman held the bolt of the door and hit it against the chariot.

The chariot, the charioteer, donkeys and Jambumali disappeared from sight. *(In Lanka, people have kept bolts harder than Maddi trees. That put them at risk.)*

Hanuman climbed up the gate and sat there.

★ ★

Again on the orders of Ravana, sons of seven ministers started with bows and armies. While the sons were leaving for battle, their mothers wailed a lot.

The battle started with Hanuman. Sons of ministers and soldiers threw various weapons and arrows at Hanuman.

Hanuman expanded his body like a hill *(Even if he doesn't increase, it is a rocky body. Does it have any softness? Nay!)* and attacked the army. He killed some with his blows. He killed some by stamping on them on the ground. He killed some by tearing them apart with his nails. He killed some by hitting them with his knees. He killed some by terrorizing them with thunder-like screams. He killed elephants, horses by stamping on them! *(Oh! What a rude fellow?)*

The battlefield was filled with terror with the screams of soldiers and cries of the animals. Blood was flowing in streams.

Lanka was filled with howls and cries.

Hanuman again climbed on to the gate and sat there.

★ ★

Ravana was lost in thought. *(Thinking about who he should send to die. Not to give back Sita!)*

He called five commanders. "This time, you go! *(This time, you have to die! It is your turn!)* You have to act carefully! It needs skill. He is not a Vanara. How can a Vanara have so much strength? Earlier, I saw Vali and others. They did not have so much strength. They were not so frightening.[322]

This guy must be some ghost. We had conquered all the gods in the past. They only might have created this ghost and sent him against us. *(Though Hanuman was saying, "I am so and so!", Ravana referred to him, "This is a ghost!")* Don't kill this ghost! Don't insult it! *(Kiss it!)* Catch it carefully. You are great

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➔ secret and it should not be revealed, didn't she? Therefore, we can't say that the poet does not know how messengers and spies ought to behave. Subsequently also, a messenger came from Sugriva to Ravana before the battle. That messenger behaved like a messenger. Then why didn't Hanuman behave like that? By the by, what is Hanuman? Is he a messenger or spy? Neither. He was a big ruffian! A ruffian of Rama! ★

322. Sundara kanda, sarga 46, slokas 9 to 12: Ravana describes how strong Hanuman is. I had seen Vali earlier, a very strong man, Jambavan, Nila, Dvivida and other Vanaras. Their lustre and valour were not of this kind." Therefore, Hanuman has more strength than those men did! Well, then, poet, why the hell couldn't this Hanuman defeat Vali but sat on Rishyamuka wailing and looked for those who could help Sugriva? ★

heroes! I know. You can destroy all the three worlds. *(These are praises to push people into battle!)* Don't feel proud that in a battle, you will attain only victory. You have to fight while protecting yourselves." *(Okay, we will see how well you fight in the battle)*. Take care!" Ravana sent them with caution.

Commanders started the battle with weapons and armies.

Battle again!

Hanuman expanded his body like a hill, flew into the sky and jumped on to the chariot of a commander. That chariot pressed itself into the ground along with the horses.

The remaining commanders intensified their fight in anger. Hanuman beat two of them with a big tree and killed them.

The remaining two threw spears and broad swords. Hanuman threw the peak of a big mountain and killed them.

After all the commanders had died, Hanuman destroyed the entire army. Hitting one elephant with another, he killed all the elephants. Hitting a horse with another horse, he killed all the horses. Hitting a soldier with another soldier, he killed all the soldiers. *(So, he did every thing in accordance with the metre of the poetry!)*

The battlefield was filled with the heaps of dead bodies, broken chariots, sliced heads and abdomens. Hanuman climbed up the gate and sat there again.

★ ★

Ravana felt sad a bit. He looked at Aksha kumara — as if asking him, "Will you go?" Aksha was Ravana's son. A very young fellow. But, a great warrior. *(This valour is always meant to either kill or be killed. That is its job!)* He was enthusiastic. Merely by the looks of his father, he understood his orders and was ready for the battle. The chariot was ready with weapons. The army was ready. He started. Seeing Hanuman, he felt happy, "This man is a great warrior. He is a fitting rival to me." *("Oh, great hero! Had you come first, all others would have survived)* .

A great battle took place between the two. The earth trembled with fear. Mountains rolled down. The sea was in turmoil. The sun was frightened and diminished its light. *(Oh, what an insult to the sun!)*

Just as it rained on the mountain, arrows rained on Hanuman.

Hanuman moved like wind away from the arrows.

Hanuman liked the valour of Aksha kumara. "This chap is a very young fellow. How do I kill him?" he felt sympathy. *(You fellow! You too have sympathy?)* Again he thought, "This chap is a great valorous fellow. If I ignore him, I will lose the battle. If we ignore a spark, it will become a great flame. So, it is better to kill him." *(Yes! Killing is very good!)*

Aksha kumara flew into the sky in his chariot, chased Hanuman and drowned him with a rain of arrows.

Hanuman slapped the chariot of Aksha kumara with his palm. That chariot, along with eight horses and the charioteer fell down from the sky. However, Aksha kumara flew into the sky with his bow.

Hanuman caught hold of his feet, rotated him swiftly, hit him against the boulders and killed him.

Gods, Gandharvas, Yakshas, sages and Siddhas felt very happy and praised Hanuman. *(For all these guys, it was an entertainment to see these killings!)*

Hanuman again climbed up the gate and sat there.

★ ★

Unable to control his anger, Ravana ordered another son, Indrajit to go to fight Hanuman. "You are a great warrior! In the past, you have defeated Indra. You have acquired many weapons due to Brahma's boons. I have no hesitation in sending you since you are the most powerful man. I did not have confidence in those whom I had sent earlier. You alone can accomplish this task. (He *should have 'cried' this 'cry' earlier itself*!) Weapons and armies are of no use. Accomplish this task with the power of your spells! Use Brahma's weapon. Concentrate on the victory." *(He will sacrifice any number of sons, soldiers or people. But, he won't return other man's wife!)*

Indrajit circumambulated as a mark of respect his father and started off with a big army in his chariots of lions.

Gods gathered in the sky to watch the battle. *(Don't they have any work to do? Their job seems only to roam about like eagles, doesn't it?)*

Indrajit shot arrows at Hanuman.

Once in a while Hanuman threw trees and mountains and escaped Indrajit's arrows.

Both of them were unable to bear each other's blows.

After thinking a while, Indrajit used Brahma's weapon.

Hanuman lost consciousness and fell to the ground. *(Thank god! So has he fallen down? Excellent! Indrajit!)*

Hanuman realized that Indrajit had used Brahma's weapon against him. In the past, Brahma had given him a boon, "Brahma's weapon will act on you only for a moment."

All the soldiers jumped on Hanuman and caught hold of him. They tied him up with jute cloth and ropes.

Brahma's weapon loses its power if you tie a person who is under the impact of that weapon with ropes and other things. *(Yes, what is the capacity of Brahma's weapon in front of ropes! Stupid weapon!)*

Seeing soldiers tying up Hanuman with ropes, Indrajit felt unhappy. "Alas! Brahma's weapon will become ineffective! The action has been wasted." *(Should he not tell them at the beginning itself?)* Once Brahma's weapon is used, no other weapons will be effective later. If he wanted to use Brahma's weapon again, it is effective only once and not effective the second time. *(Oh! What a crazy weapon is this!)*

However, Hanuman was not aware that Brahma's weapon had no effect on him then. *(What Mr. Poet, you have slighted Hanuman so much?)* Hanuman thought, "Any way, this is also good for me. Any way, I have to talk to Ravana!"

All the soldiers dragged Hanuman with enthusiasm through the royal streets. They abused him, kicked, gave him blows and hit him. *(No use, he was an insensitive fellow!)*

"Who is this fellow? Useless fellow! Where has he come from? What has he to do here?" People asked questions of one another.

"Hit him! Kill him! Burn him! *(Slay the son of a dog!)* — People shouted along the streets.

"Hey! Walk!"

"Does he walk? Push the fellow forward. *A monkey-faced fellow!*" **323**

All the people dragged Hanuman to Ravana.

Ravana looked at Hanuman with great wonder. "A great warrior. He must be Nandiswara or Banasura", he amazed.

Hanuman looked at Ravana with awe. He saw the ornaments all over the body of Ravana and they appeared as if they were made imaginatively. The necklaces on the chest of Ravana looked like cranes flying amidst clouds.... Smearing of sandal paste all over the body.... Fragrance... Ten heads.... crown with pearls.... *(to which of the ten hands?)*... golden throne studded with crystals and gems.... silk pillows on the throne. Beautiful young women fan around him. *(Perhaps, the air may not move*

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323. Sundara kanda, sarga 48, slokas 56 & 57: "Who is this fellow? Whose man is he? Where did he come from? What has to do in Lanka? Who gave him shelter?" The Rakshasa-warriors present there were questioning each other. Among them, some very angry Rakshasas said to each other, "Kill this fellow. Burn him. Eat him" ★

if those women were not beautiful and young?) Ravana sat in the royal court surrounded by many ministers and commanders.

Seeing Ravana, Hanuman thought, "Ravana is a man of lustre with great royal qualities. But what is the use? He is an utterly vile man. If he gets angry he will burn all the worlds into ashes and drown them in the sea. Otherwise, he could have become as great as Indra! **324**

Twirling his moustache, Ravana looked at his ministers and ordered them, "Decide about this fellow!"

A minister called Prahasta looked at Hanuman and asked, "Who are you? Why have you come here?" **325**

Hanuman narrated every thing. "I am the messenger of Sri Rama. I am the minister of Sugriva. My name is Hanuman. I spoiled Asoka vana in order to get an opportunity to talk to Ravana. When your soldiers came to fight, I fought the battle only for my self-protection. I don't yield to any weapon. I yielded to Brahma's weapon only with a view to see Ravana." Then, seeing Ravana, Hanuman said, "Ravana! Sugriva is like your brother. *(Sugriva is a brother of Rama on the one hand and also a brother of Ravana on the other!)* Sugriva has enquired about your welfare. Sugriva himself sent me. *(Then why does he say that he is Rama's messenger? He should say, "I am Sugriva's messenger!")* Ravana! Listen, I will tell you good things. There is a great pious man Sri Rama, the eldest son of a great pious man king Dasaratha. As per his father's orders, he has come to the forests. As he could not find his wife, he was searching the forests, he came to our country and made friends with Sugriva. Sri Rama is not an ordinary man. He is a great hero who killed Vali. No body can stand in front of him. Don't think arrogantly that none can kill you. Sugriva is enough to kill you. Nobody can save you from him. You might have done some pious deeds. All your *punya* (piety) is exhausted since you have lived happily so far. Now, you have to face the consequences of your sins. Rama has destroyed all your force in Janasthana. He killed Vali. He has joined with Sugriva. Now, death is inevitable for you. I alone can kill you… but I have kept quiet since Sri Rama has vowed to kill you. You may be thinking that Sita Devi is an ordinary woman! For you, she is *like a rope of Yama* and an utter dark night! It is not proper on the part of a good man like you to imprison another man's wife. *(So, Ravana was a good man before he brought Sita!)* Present Sita to Sri Rama and seek refuge in him! Otherwise, death will be in your bedside. Even Indra cannot withstand Sri Rama. Then how powerful are you….." Hanuman went on

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324. Hanuman had already seen Ravana in Asoka vana. Then he was not surprised. The poet had forgotten that Hanuman had seen Ravana once. He is describing it as if this was the first time. Or, does he appear to Hanuman with so much brightness because he sees him while he is sitting on the throne? This must be the reason. Ravana's brightness had come since he was on the throne *(because of his power!)* Whoever sits on that throne will glow with brightness. The poet praises Ravana at every place. He describes him as a 'great valorous man'. This is because he is going to say that such a valorous man too was defeated and died at the hands of Rama. He praised Vali in the same way. He has to attribute the greatness of having conquered great men to Rama later, doesn't he?

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325. Sundara kanda, sarga 50, slokas 6 to 8: "Ask where did this wicked fellow come from and why?" said Ravana. See how Prahasta, a minister, asked Hanuman: "Oh, Vanara! Be relaxed! Many good things will happen to you! Don't fear. If Indra has sent you, tell us the truth. I will release you." What was this appeasement of Hanuman? What was this assurance of a minister, (*'I will release you!'*) without the permission of the king? This minister says he will release a man who has terrorized so much and killed so many people!

★

thus.

“Kill this fellow at once! Ravana shouted furiously. *(Ah! What a nice fury!)*

★ ★

Ravana’s younger brother Vibhishana rose up obediently. “Your Excellency! Please cool down! Please listen to my appeal. Virtuous kings should not impose a death penalty on a messenger who conveys messages from one king to another.

Ravana became furious and roared, “This fellow is a wicked man. There is nothing wrong in killing him. Can a messenger resort to so much wickedness?” [326]

Vibhishana bowed very obediently. “Pardon me your Excellency! It is true that this messenger has caused extreme harm to us. Yet you should not impose the death sentence on a messenger. You can impose any other punishment. You can cut his limbs off. You can shave off his head. You can give lashes. You can burn his body with hot iron rod… you can punish him in any manner except by killing. In all countries and all races, they observe the moral that they should not kill a messenger…. I am not qualified to tell all this to a wise man like you. This is not proper on the part of a noble man like you. You know what is right and what is wrong. You know the justice of the entire world. You are speaking so out of anger. However, all your scholarship of the scriptures will go waste if you yield to anger. *(Is this sermon not there in the scriptures?)* — It is obligatory to enquire about this offence and punish him. However, we should not cause harm to his life.

You have to spare this messenger and punish his master. Only if we spare him, he will go and tell his master about the things here. Then the battle between you and Rama will take place. Your valour will become known all over the world. You don’t care about war. Warriors who wish your good, loyal men and soldiers whom you maintain are large in number. If you wish, you can go for a battle right at this moment. It is not wise to lose the profit of battle. You are not only a great warrior but also a great-enlightened man. A great man of justice. You are acquainted with all the scriptures. The best

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326. Sundara kanda, sarga 52, sloka 12: The poet cannot write that Ravana did not get angry at Hanuman, can he? Therefore, he is obliged to show that anger. It is unavoidable for him to write that Ravana said he would kill Hanuman. However, the poet feels it is wrong on the part of Ravana to say so. See what the poet says: “Hearing Ravana’s words — which are unjust, full of fault and about which base men feel happy — Vibhishana, best among good men, spoke in a better and meaningful way.” The poet was glorifying Vibhishana.

If Hanuman were a messenger he ought to have come to Ravana at the beginning itself, oughtn’t he? Ravana’s questioning, ‘Is a messenger expected to do this?’ is unjust! Fault! Baseness! According to the poet, in the whole of Lanka, Vibhishana alone appears to be a very good man. Even in the dream of Trijata…. while all the warriors in Lanka go to hell, Vibhishana alone goes to heaven on an elephant!

In fact, Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Surpanakha were very ugly when they were born but Vibhishana was not like that!

Uttara kanda, sargas 9 & 10: “The last son of Kaikasi was Vibhishana. He was a man of justice. When he was born, it rained flowers. The musical instruments of gods were heard in the sky.”

When Brahma asked Vibhishana, ‘What do you want?’ Vibhishana did not ask for any bad things. He asked, “my mind should never abandon justice.’ We will see later what sort of justice this man has and why the poet glorifies him.

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among the best. There is no equal to you in this world — Heed my appeal and spare the messenger."

Ravana was lost in thought. *(Nay, he was lost in praises.)*

"All right! Give him some severe punishment. Burn that tail. Let us see how he will show his face to his people! Set fire to the tail and parade him in all the streets", the king ordered.

The soldiers covered Hanuman's tail with cloth, poured oil on it and lit the fire.

The procession started with shouts, drumbeats, screams and laughter.

While the soldiers kicked, hit and paraded him in the streets, Hanuman felt happy, "Last night I did not see all the streets clearly. I can see them clearly in the day now."

The procession was going on with the big tumult. Women, aged and the young people — every one came out of their houses, abused Hanuman and were happy.

"What sort of a messenger are you? Rascal! *(Let your face be burnt!)*," all the people abused him with enthusiasm.[327]

(All people in Lanka seemed to have a political consciousness, didn't they?)

Hanuman also saw new kinds of airplanes and secret underground houses.

The maidservants in Asoka vana went to Sita and told her with joy, "That *monkey faced fellow*, who came for you, is fixed. They set fire to his tail and parading him in the streets."

Sita felt great sorrow and prayed to the god of fire. "Oh, god of fire! If I get the fruits of devoted wives, don't burn Hanuman. Cool down! If I have the good luck of living with my husband again, don't burn Hanuman, cool down! If Sugriva was capable of making me cross this sea of grief, cool down! If I have a good character, cool down!" She prayed repeatedly.

Though it was burning, Hanuman's tail cooled down without any pain. Hanuman thought of Sri Rama. "This is due to the grace of Sri Rama. While I was crossing the sea too, he sent Mainaka. Everything is Rama's grace. Even the fire has cooled down to help in the task of Sri Rama", he thought.

He puffed up his body and broke off the ropes. With the burning tail, he thrashed the people round him and flew swiftly upward.

Again, he pulled out an iron bolt of a door and beat up all the guards. Not satisfied with the anger, he thought, "I will burn all Lanka.... I will harm the enemy."

With his burning tail, he began to fly fearlessly over the houses like a lightning in sky.

Prahasta's house, Mahaparshva's house, Jambumali's, Sumali's, Kumbhakarna's .... he set flame all their houses — except Vibhishana's house! The wind cooperated with the fire. Some houses caught fire on their own. *(This principle did not apply to Vibhishana's house!)*

Flying around with enthusiasm, Hanuman set aflame all the mansions of Ravana.

All the beautiful houses filled up with smokes and burnt fiercely with loud explosions. While burning, the houses fell like flakes.

All Lanka filled with the wailing, shouting and cries for help of the people. "My husband! My younger brother! My son!... My friend!.... My child!.... Alas!" — Yells *touched the sky*. Fearing for their life, people ran from the midst of their houses. Unable to come out of the burning doors, women and children cried for help, "Save us! Save us!"

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327. Sundara kanda, sarga 53, slokas 23 & 24: In the front of their houses, in the pavillions and along the royal streets, the Rakshasas shouted, "This monkey is a messenger!" As they wanted to see Hanuman who had a burning tail — women, young and old people came in groups from their houses into the streets joyously. The cruel minded Rakshasas, the sinful Rakshasas beat and abused Hanuman."

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As there was no way to climb down from the top, mothers who hugged the infant children to their bosoms, ran helter skelter, confused and fell down.

Carts, chariots, roofs — all exploded with a big noise.

The earth was not satisfied with any number of dead bodies that fell. The fire was not satisfied with any number of burnt sticks. Hanuman was not satisfied even after the entire Lanka turned to ashes.

(See how beautiful the burning Lanka is in the poet's view!) The flames of the fire shone like various kinds of flowers — red like *Kunkuma* flowers at some places, white like *Burugu* flowers at some places, yellow like *Modugu* flowers at some places! The clouds that rose from the flames looked like black lotuses. Some best Rakshasas gathered as a group and began to talk, "Ah! This Hanuman is not an ordinary Vanara. A great aura of Vishnu might have descended in this form to destroy Rakshasas. *(These people are also Rakshasas. Even their houses are being burnt. Yet they are praising Hanuman. They may have belonged to Vibhishana's group!)* The entire anger that Brahma had on Rakshasas must have assumed the form of this Vanara. Or, was Indra, the lord of gods! Or the moon?... How great was his brightness! He must be Yama or the sun."

(If some one sets fire to a small lock of hair on the head of the poet and also his lower garment, he would have realized what sort of words would come from his mouth when he jumped in pain. "Aha! How brightly my lock of hair is shining! Aha! How brightly my lower garment is burning with its extended lips!... Those who set me alight must be gods. Kinneras or Kimpurushas! The sun or the moon!" — Will he praise thus or jump about in fear for his life and hurl abuses!)

Thinking Sri Ramachandra, Hanuman recollects all his great deeds and feels happy. All the gods in the sky praised Hanuman. They felt very happy for he had caused great harm to Lanka.[328]

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328. Sundara kanda, sarga 54, slokas 18 to 44: See the description of burning Lanka. "The fire which is equivalent to a crore suns — like a lightning with various kinds of frightening sounds, as if tearing the entire globe — surrounded all Lanka and glowed."

"Oh, Father! Oh, Child! Oh, my husband! Oh, my life! Every thing is ruined!" Some Rakshasas made many kinds of sounds."

"Some women, spreading their hair, carrying the infant children, fell quickly from the burning upstairs and glowed like lightning in the sky."

"The fire is not satisfied with wood or grass. The earth is not satisfied with the dead bodies of Rakshasas. Hanuman, the best man among Vanaras, is not satisfied, though he lit the fire."

"The flames of the fire glowed like Modugu flowers at some place, like Burugu flowers at some places and like Kunkuma flowers at some place."

"At some places, while the fire was cooling down, the clouds of smoke glowed like black lotuses."

"All the best Rakshasas of Lanka gathered and talked in this manner...."

"All gods, best sages, Gandharvas and Vidyadharas felt indescribable joy."

Thus, *Sundara kanda* (Beautiful kanda) is nothing but the beauty of the burning of Lanka filled with the cries of infant children, the wailing of people and cries for help with fear for their lives! If we recite this *Sundara kanda* rains fall! Droughts disappear! We get good fortune!

If any king of a foreign country invades our country, plunders our riches and wealth, demolishes our temples, causes loss of life and property.... our history will be filled with the atrocities of that king. What, then, did Rama's ruffian messenger do in Lanka? ★

Hanuman dipped his tail in the sea and cooled it down. He thought of Sita. "Alas! Sita must have been burnt down. What a great blunder I committed! That is why people say 'anger is the cause of ruin'. Angry people kill even their teachers. I have killed Sri Rama's wife. Alas! I could not think of Sita's safety!.... If Sita has died, what is the use of my going to Kishkindha?..... Hearing the news of Sita's death, Rama and Lakshmana will die. Seeing the death of his dear friend, Sugriva will die. Bharata and Satrughna will die in Ayodhya. *(They bring in Satrughna in the matter of deaths!)* If the Raghu dynasty perishes, all the people will wail loudly — Oh! All this has happened due to my monkey mentality. I will not go to Kishkindha at all. I will sacrifice my life here itself.... Though I suspect this, can fire burn Sri Rama's wife? It has not burnt me, hasn't it?" Hanuman was lost in thoughts and felt sorry.

He heard what the gods were talking in the sky.

"Aha! Though all Lanka has burnt down, the place where Sita was staying is safe! Though all the people of Lanka are wailing, Sita Devi is safe! Hanuman has done a great job worthy of praise."

Learning about Sita's safety, Hanuman felt happy. "I myself will go to see her", he thought, he went into Asoka vana and stood in front of Sita.

"Mother! You are alive due to god's grace. I could see you again."

Sita felt very happy about what Hanuman had done and praised him. "You are the annihilator of the enemies. Your strength alone will fetch you glory. You alone are capable of killing all these people. You alone will get the fame of bringing the entire Vanara army here. When Sri Rama comes here, he will destroy Lanka further, ruin it completely and take me away, only then will he get fame. You alone can encourage Sri Rama."

Saluting Sita, Hanuman said, "Mother! Sri Rama will soon come with many armies of Vanaras and bears and destroy Lanka. Don't worry at all!" said Hanuman. He flew from there and landed on the mountain near the bank of the sea.

To cross the sea, Hanuman expanded his body and turned the peaks of big mountains into heaps of pebbles. Beneath his feet, the mountain caves were crushed like the nests of sparrows and lions in those caves roared fiercely. The ends of the upper garments of women of *Vidyadhara* tribe, who lived in those mountains slid (*The poet is never inattentive while describing the sliding of the upper garments of women!*), their ornaments got entangled with their necks and they flew up into the sky. Great snakes crawled hesitantly with fear under Hanuman's feet. Got crushed under Hanuman's feet, the Arishta mountain pressed itself down to ground level.

Hanuman flew into the sky like the moon.

Like the moon and Garuda, Hanuman flew amidst the clouds. He went as if he dragged the sun, the moon and the stars along with him. He roared with victory like the wind making sounds in the caves of the mountain. The roaring of Hanuman echoed on Mahendra Mountain as if the sky burst with a terrific noise.

Vanaras over the entire Mahendra Mountain jumped with joy that Hanuman was coming. "He is coming after accomplishing the task. Otherwise he wouldn't have roared like a lion", said Jambavan and made all the soldiers happy. All the soldiers climbed up the tops of the branches of huge trees and shook the floral branches to draw the attention of Hanuman.

Hanuman slipped on to Mahendra Mountain like a mountain whose wings are broken.

All people gathered round him with joy.

Some people brought him fruits and bulbs.

"I saw Sita", said Hanuman. "Tell us. Tell us. Tell us in detail", asked every body happily. *(That they will not have death sentences and can go home happily.)*

Hanuman began to narrate *serenely*. "I had started from this mountain hadn't I?... I was going like a boat on the sea... Then the king of the mountain called Mainaka....." Thus he started. His rejection of Mainaka's hospitality, entering into and coming out of Surasa's mouth, killing of Simhika, reaching the other bank and fighting with the goddess of Lanka, searching the entire Lanka for Sita, finally seeing Sita in Asoka vana, Ravana's arrival along with his wives, the threatening of Sita by Ravana, Sita's rejection of Ravana, Trijata's dream, his conversation with Sita, Sita's refusal to come along with him, giving the Chudamani, his destroying of the Asoka vana, battle in Lanka, finally the burning of Lanka — He narrated each and every detail *like* he was *stringing beads in order in a thread.*

(Of course, also by fabricating some. That Ravana tried to beat Sita but Mandodari prevented him and that Sita said she would live only for two months...and a few more things that did not happen.)

After telling all the things about Lanka, Hanuman said, "Sita is chaste. Our attempts have not gone waste. Ravana is also rich in penance. That's why, he was not destroyed although he touched Sita. Even fire does not have the power, which Sita has. If Sita gets angry, there is nothing that she will not be able to do.

Let us not go to Kishkindha. We will again go to Lanka. We will kill Ravana, get Sita then return to Kishkindha. *(Even if Sita says, 'I won't come, please!')* If Jambavan, Angada, Panasa and Nila go to Lanka, it will not take even a moment to destroy Lanka. *(So, now some more heroes are ready to go to Lanka! These people said they couldn't fly. Now, how can they fly?)* Having given up sleep and food Sita — who has big breasts — is very frail. Because of her separation from the husband, Sita — who has beautiful buttocks — is so pathetic that she arouses sympathy. The reason for Sita not killing Ravana with the power of her devotion to her husband is the miracle of Ravana. *(This means, the poet has remembered a new point!)* "Let us rescue Sita and bring her back. Tell me your opinion", asked Hanuman.

Angada said, "Yes, what you have said is right. How can we tell Rama that we saw Sita but have not brought her?... Even gods cannot conquer us, can they? We will go to Lanka."

But Jambavan said, "We should not do anything without knowing Rama's willingness"

★ ★

All started for Kishkindha happily.

They came close to Kishkindha. There is a garden called Madhuvana. Sugriva liked it very much. Sugriva's maternal uncle Dadhimukha guarded that garden with some retinue. All the Vanaras entered it. They asked Angada to permit them to drink wine. Angada agreed. All the soldiers entered the garden with laughter and shouts. They began to destroy trees and creepers.

They drank all the wine filled in pots in the garden and beat the guards up in an intoxicated mood.

"Drink as you like. Do, as you like. If any one stops you, I will finish him off." assuring all, Hanuman roared. *(Fully drunk, Hanuman thinks that he is still in Lanka).*

"Hanuman has accomplished a great task. You follow what he says", said Angada.

The atrocities of the Vanaras increased.

The guards of the garden went to Dadhimukha and cried. Unable to control his anger, Dadhimukha took a tree and proceeded to beat up the soldiers.

Angada felled Dadhimukha to the ground, hit him with his knees and beat him until he lost consciousness.

Dadhimukha fainted for some time and got up. "I will report this to the king. He will surely get Angada beaten with canes." He flew swiftly and went to Sugriva.

Sugriva was with Rama and Lakshmana. *(Dadhimukha might have gone first to the king's palace and again came back swiftly to Rishyamuka, if Sugriva were not there. It was only flying, wasn't it!)*

Dadhimukha told Sugriva, "Angada came along with the army and completely destroyed Madhuvana. When I tried to prevent him, he beat me up until my whole body bled. They beat me all our guards in the garden."

Lakshmana asked Sugriva, "What is this guardian of the garden saying? Why is he grieving?" *(Perhaps, he didn't know the language!)*

Sugriva told him about what happened and said, "If all those who went towards the South are so happy, they must have accomplished the task. They must have seen Sita. Hanuman alone must have accomplished it . None else can do it. Hanuman is valorous, good natured and thoughtful." Sugriva praised Hanuman and said to Dadhimukha, "Having seen Sita Devi, they might have drunk wine. Angada will not return if they hadn't seen Sita. I am very happy about what they did. It is no fault of theirs. I want to see them quickly." Sugriva was in a hurry. *(If you complain to the king, he will ask his men to give you two more kicks — goes a saying. This is exactly like that!)*

Dadhimukha also felt happy, flew swiftly and stood before Angada in the Madhuvana. "Prince! Pardon me. As I was not aware of the task that you have accomplished, I prevented you. The king is eager to meet you."

Angada asked the Vanaras, "We have comfortably drunk wine. Taken rest. Shall we go to the king? Give me your opinion."

"You decide since you are a good-natured man. You don't have any arrogance about your riches and wealth. We will do as you say", said all.

"Then, let's go", said Angada and flew upward.

All the people flew. They landed on Rishyamuka.

Hanuman went in front of Sri Rama and conveyed the happy news, "Sita Devi is safe and has preserved her chastity (conjugal fidelity to the husband)" [329]

Sri Rama and Lakshmana felt very happy.

[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

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329. Sundara kanda, sarga 64, sloka 38: "The Vanaras felt very happy and descended near Sri Rama. Then, a great shouldered Hanuman bowed his head and informed him that Sita was safe with her vow of devotion to her husband."

It is not enough if he said, "Sita is safe". He has to say, "Sita is safe, being a loyal wife". This is real welfare! This is the news, which Rama wanted!

★

Story-10

The Gift that didn't Cost a Penny!

Rishyamuka is crowded with people.

Half the people of Kishkindha were present there. People of the neighbouring villages, who were on their way to their villages, gathered there to see what was happening. All were happy that those who had gone in search of Sita had returned, though late.

Under the *Turayi* tree, Rama bent his head and was wailing with *Chudamani* in his hand. He had just woken up after he had fainted for a long time as soon as he first received Chudamani.

Lakshmana sat beside his brother reverently and his eyes welled with tears.

All the *elders* like Hanuman, Sugriva, Angada and Jambavan were sitting in front of Rama. The rich people, pundits, priests and poets sat behind the king. Ordinary people.... their *kids and goats*, every body sat in groups on rocks, mounds, trees and wherever they found a place and were chatting. Some cowherd-boys had come to the hill but some are still immersed in playing, singing and swimming. Pausing their playing and songs intermittently, they first finished laughing and again slid back into playing. Some times, they skilfully combined the work of singing and laughing.

Hearing the laughs that came from a distance, Rama's sorrow increased further. "Alas! Laughs are heard in the world even amidst so much tragedy! The base human beings are unable to realise how bad it is to laugh." Putting his head on his shoulders, Rama wept so much that his back and shoulders shook violently. After weeping and weeping, he suddenly burst out crying, "Sita!"

Unable to see Rama's face some people lowered their heads.

Some people's eyes welled up with tears.

Some people turned to a side and *wiped their noses*.

People at a distance suddenly stopped talking and remained silent. Thinking that, "This is the right time!' *silence tried to reign*. However, does it get a kingdom so easily? People did not allow silence to reign for long with their whispers and tumult.

Sugriva took an initiative like an elderly person and opened the actual matter for discussion on seeing Hanuman. "See, how Sri Rama is convulsing. Tell him all the good news *with your own mouth* about Sita Devi. Tell him in detail *like one strings beads one at a time*. You know how to *pluck* words, don't you? Tell like those who recite poetry. At least then Ramayya will get some peace," said Sugriva with enthusiasm.

Feeling shy, Hanuman looked at the ground for a while. He cleared his voice and sighed sorrowfully. He saluted Rama reverently. "Ramayya! I am very ashamed that I have returned without killing that wicked man. I could not rescue that *great mother* Sita. Oh! Why do I need this life? *Let it be burnt*!" He lowered his head.

Jambavan interfered and consoled Hanuman. "Hanuman! Do not feel sorry. What can you do without the *command of Sri Rama's feet*?"

Controlling his tears, Lakshmana asked eagerly, "Hanuman! Is my respected sister-in-law safe? First, tell us that pleasant news!

Hanuman lowered his head again and said

sorrowfully, "What safety, my lord! Has that great woman eaten food since she was parted from her husband? Did she even blink her eyes? She has become thin *like a straw* and stays alive somehow *keeping life in her weakened eyes*...I am a sinful fellow... I am a wicked fellow... Without rescuing that great woman, I have come back." Hanuman lifted his face and again lowered it.

Rama was uncontrollably joyous to hear that Sita was pining for his company without sleep and food. "Alas! Sita!" he turned his face to a side.

Lakshmana was irritated for Hanuman was delaying narrating the details so much without telling actual news. "Hanuman! Brother is grieving a lot. You are already watching it. Whatever you saw there.... Submit quickly and make brother happy. Is my sister-in-law alive?

"Oh, no! Who else could live if Sita Devi were not alive?" Hanuman puffed out his cheeks in anger. Hanuman's looks were full of heroism — that he had accomplished the task by crossing those hills, valleys, by swimming river and overcoming great hurdles and entering Lanka.

Looking around, Sugriva said, "Cool down, Hanuman!" and he stepped back a bit. Sugriva knew that Hanuman becomes mad if he gets angry. Hanuman himself tells people, "If I get angry, I am not a human being."

Songs, laughs in the wind were coming closer...moving away....and coming closer.

Looking at Chudamani all the while Rama wept, lowering his head.

Thinking about his sister-in-law, Lakshmana forgot about his brother, stretched his back, sat straight and then stretched his neck.

Reducing his anger in his cheek, Hanuman looked at Rama and saluted him again. Hanuman knows how effective salutes are. "Rama! You need not wail any longer. Your wife is a great virtuous woman. She is safe, protecting the chastity," Hanuman revealed the actual news.

"....protecting the chastity...." These words were heard like the recitation of the Vedas by Rama. Unable to control his joy, he burst out crying. "Is my Sita safe, my lad!... At another man... that wicked man.... What is the news.... once again tell me that!" Rama lowered his head.

"Ah! What a love!...What a love!" Sugriva put his *finger on his nose*, in wonder — very ignorant as to when one should put his finger on the nose. A pundit sighed, "Alas! How deep is the anguish of Rama's soul for the sake of his wife?"

"Sir! What is the soul?" a young man *asked in the ear of the pundit*. That boy had a desire for a long time to know what a 'soul' was! He had asked many people. Every one had explained in their own way. If he goes by what they had said, each just will have hundreds of souls. Whereas for hundreds of wicked people, there is not even a single soul. That young man was still searching for the secret of the soul. If any one opened his mouth, he waited hoping that they would speak of soul and he could ask about it. All people said to him, "My god! We *fear even to yawn* in front of you."

As he had an opportunity, this researcher of soul caught hold of the pundit.

"Soul means soul of the universe, my lord!" said the pundit.

"What is the soul of the universe....?"

"Can't you understand that soul of the universe is nothing but soul?"

"What is soul....?" The young man was about to ask and then he was lost in thought, "What is this? How come this gentleman puts me in a difficult situation?"

By then Hanuman had told Sri Rama that good news, that happy news for the third time... seventh time... and even tenth time. "Sir! Your wife is chaste!.... Safe! She does not even look at another man. She is a devoted wife! She has treated other men like straw! She is chaste!.... She is thin like a skeleton...Yet she will not yield to that wicked man. She is chaste!... No doubt. She is chaste!"

As he heard, Rama began to suspect. In fact, Sita may not be chaste... May be, in order to make me believe... convince... delude.... deceive.... Hanuman himself was fabricating lies... to some how convince me... make me accept... delude... otherwise, why does he say the same thing so many times. Rama's head was reeling at a great speed. Darkness enveloped his eyes. His ears became deaf. Lowering his head... closing his eyes... leaning, he fainted. This time, really!

None was anxious. All the elders were used to this fainting business daily. They knew that this was a love-related faint and not a disease-related faint.

Young men in Kishkindha — who had fallen in love for the first time and those whose wives had gone to their parental homes — heard about Rama's faints and made many attempts to learn such faints. They could never get a grip on Rama's method of fainting even once. Even if they fell to the ground closing their eyes, they used to suddenly be reminded of some work of the field, woodcutting or fetching of water and their faint used to disappear. After completing that work and finding some time, if he were about to faint, some friend would come and scold him, "What is the use if you cry? Get up. Think of what to do!" If that friend had not turned up at that moment and if there were members of the his family, they did not even bother about it. Not only that, they would not fan him realising that their son had fainted but all the aged people would shout, "Lad! Why have you fallen asleep at odd hours?" Thus, none ever had an opportunity to faint happily because of some difficulties and hurdles.

"How can we compete with Sri Rama? He has thrown the whole burden on others... while his brother cooks and feeds him.... falling every now and then into love-related faints... is possible only for Rama. How is it possible for us? This is how all the youth of Kishkindha were disheartened.

Since his brother had fallen into a faint, Lakshmana bent reverently and fanned him with a twig of leaves.

As the leaves occasionally touched his face and itched his cheeks, Rama slowly opened his eyes and got up. He pressed his eyes with his lower garment and scratched his cheeks.

All those talking to each other lowered their voices.

Rama looked at Hanuman keenly as if he thought, "Is he really telling me the truth about Sita?"

Hanuman moved a bit closer towards Rama and said, "Don't grieve, my lord! Be bold. You will meet your wife soon. Listen to me... I can't see your sorrow..." He folded his hands. "You will feel happy if you hear all that I say. In those hills and valleys... along my journey... I saw many good people and bad people. Let me tell you, for example, I thought it was almost a big fight with a gentle man called Mainaka.... He seemed to be a quarrelsome man. I felt very sorry, "What is this? I am going on Rama's job. I have to return safely. What is this quarrel on my way? Is Rama not kind?.... Why did he send such a wicked man as a hurdle?"

Rama lifted his head in wonder. Who is this Mainaka? Why does he send him as an obstacle? Rama is confused and wanted to say, "My lad, I don't know who that Mainaka is." However, Hanuman went on narrating things with enthusiasm. "Ramayya! Your grace has been by my side and protected me. I think you alone gave him good sense. Do you know how much affection he showed me? He insisted that I should eat a bit, and relax for a while.... If it were not for the good sense that you created....."

Rama remained serenely silent as if he himself had given such good qualities to that Mainaka. He listened to Hanuman with surprise about what would have happened if it had slipped from his tongue that, he did not know who that Mainaka was! Narrating graphically all that had happened during his journey, Hanuman enthusiastically reached Simhika who quarrelled with him.

Recovered from his thoughts, Rama was about to say serenely with a smile, "Yes, I......." However, Rama suddenly withheld his words, seeing Hanuman's trend.

Hanuman was shaking with anger at Simhika. "While I was going on my way, she called me with out any justification picked up a quarrel. I became furious, gave her a good thrashing and said to her, "Go and *tell whoever or wherever you want.*" He described why and how the quarrel had gone.

Some people felt very happy because Hanuman beat somebody somewhere. Rama sighed deeply because he had escaped from the danger of Simhika's episode. "Never should I have a slip of tongue. I should hear the whole thing until the end with a smile. Depending on it, I have to take the side suitable to me. When I was young, my teachers who taught me politics told me about this. All these years, I had remembered it well and practised it.... Now.... somehow...."

"Sir! This is how I reached the city of Lanka. Until it became dark, I hid myself in the hills away from the city and started for the city at night. Somehow, I eluded the guards here and there and roamed about in the dark streets and lanes. I peeped through the windows. I climbed up the walls and looked into their premises.... At last, I pushed on into Ravana's harem.

Those who had already heard all this narration tempted others, "Here it is going to be very interesting! Women in Lanka are excellent!"

Those who were at a distance came forward quickly. Even king Sugriva was obliged to move forward. People pushed from behind.

While narrating things, Hanuman felt a bit uncomfortable and shy when all people pushed forward. "Everybody should see for themselves what I saw in those houses. It is beyond my capacity to describe it."

Some people felt very disappointed. "Hell with this fellow! It seems he won't talk those things!"

Some people shouted at him with enthusiasm, "Tell us....Tell us...You must tell!.... How will we know if you don't tell us?"

Somebody whispered in Sugriva's ears with smiles, Sugriva compelled Hanuman, "Come on, tell us. How will we know about it if you don't tell?"

Nodding his head, Rama sighed dejectedly.

Feeling shy, Hanuman began. "In some houses... men... women... chit chatting... hugging each other... laughing... happily... After seeing all those people...."

"Look, you have skipped something. No, you can't skip", shouted somebody irritably.

Many people saw reason in that irritation.

Unable to avoid, Hanuman said without feeling shy. "Sri Rama! I saw men and women fondling each other and having a lot of fun. I saw naked women who hugged their husbands. I saw beautiful women whose jewels broke in the embraces of their husbands. Oh! What a beauty! Each one of them...! Those beautiful women..."

"What good fortune! What good fortune!" Sugriva looked at Hanuman with envy.

Lakshmana angrily turned his face toward the stream.

People whispered and laughed aloud.

The mood of the people was as if they were going to a marriage.

Suddenly Rama frowned and looked around *serenely*. Next moment, all people gave way to the *reins of the kingdom to silence*.

Hanuman carried on his description of Ravana's harem. "In those beautiful rooms... there... on a bed... I saw a beautiful woman..."

Rama listened trembling that Hanuman may say, "It was Sita!"

"She was Mandodari. Sita was not seen anywhere..."

Rama sighed with ease and closed his eyes.

"How did Hanuman come to know that she was Mandodari?" one man asked another man beside him.

"Why can't he know? If he had asked, the guards would have told him", said one stupid gentle man.

The gentle man who asked the question was amazed, "What! A fellow who moved about secretly... would he ask the guards?"

The man who replied realised his mistake. "Oh, I see! Well… in fact…. Was it not written on the cot that this is Mandodari's bed?.... Any way… Hanuman is saying some thing… Listen first. You crazy fellow…. With your crazy doubts…." He said irritably and turned his face away.

By then, Hanuman climbed a tree in the Asoka vana and hid himself. "There… a woman sat *like a goddess of sorrow*…." He said.

Some people were very disappointed as Hanuman quickly finished the description of women in Lanka and picked up Sita's condition.

A gentle man said to the others, "As Rama is anxious… Hanuman has started talking about Sita…. but… you know… how nicely he narrated things when he told us…."

"Why don't you tell us what he told you?"

"Not now. I will tell you later."

Hanuman narrated Sita's condition. "She has no sleep, no food, no bath and nothing. She is very thin like a skeleton. She *sheds tears continuously from the eyes to the earth*. She was wearing the same sari, which she had worn the day Ravana carried her away. That sari was so dirty that it was like an earthen tile. I don't know how many times it has to go to *washer man's tank* to get its original form…." He carried on his narration of the sari for some time. Then, he concluded, "Sita Devi is like a flower filled with soil."

Rama's face became clear like the sky free from the clouds.

"Oh! So many days without taking a bath? Why should she remain like that?" whispers from many corners began. Silence lost its reign in the corners as well.

"If the whole body itches…."

"Whether it itches or erupts, she has to remain like that! Is it not enough to scratch?"

"Can devoted wives scratch?.... Is it not wrong?"

"Yes, yes! If she scratches, she will get comfort… If she scratches and get comfort in the absence of the husband… it may be wrong… I did not think about it."

"Then, why did Rama take a bath daily comfortably?.... Moreover, he takes a bath making Lakshmana scrub his whole body!"

"Nay! It is nothing wrong in the case of men because they do not have any vows."

"Rama has the vow of one wife, do you know? Rama too must not take a bath. Suppose Rama takes a bath daily and is healthy. Suppose Sita gets eruptions over her body… and she loses health, beauty and everything. Then if Rama says he doesn't want Sita?"

"Alas!...Why do devoted wives get skin eruptions?"

"I don't agree with what you say. Didn't Hanuman say that Sita's head and body were dirty?"

While Hanuman was describing Sita's plight, people at a distance were not listening to him.

"Sita laments, 'Rama! Lakshmana'!"

"She anxiously dreams, 'when shall I reach my husband'?"

"She wails so much that the ground is wet with her tears and has turned into mud."

Each word sounds like a boon to Rama.

The chit chatting among people increased. "If not like that, how can Sita be different?... Will she laugh …. swing… jump?...Uncle, I forgot to tell you. Your cow has calved"

"Did it calve?… I too was expecting it to. When I was at Mahendra Mountain, I thought it must have calved. Did it get a female calf?"

"Nay! It was male calf…What if it were a male calf? It is charming with a mark on its face…."

"Hell with it!...Again male calf? No use. This time, I will sell it off when it becomes pregnant."

"Then if it has a female calf?"

Some body hit him in the back. "Bloody nuisance. Stop it. Ravana is coming!...."

By then Ravana had already arrived along with his wives, lady attendants, wine jars and even seats around him.

Hanuman enthusiastically and joyfully described Ravana. "Those glittering ornaments, that yellowish crown, that blue waist rope, that red scarf, that……"

Rama lowered his head out of grief. "Tell me about my Sita!"

"On seeing Ravana… that great woman… shivered like a bird drenched in the rain. She shrunk and hid her breasts, lower belly and the thighs.

Rama fainted, as he could not control his joy. Most people there did not know that fainting is possible not only because of grief but also due to joy.

Lakshmana at once began to fan Rama. Those who sat closer to them shed a few tears.

"It is very sinful to separate a wife and husband."

"Then, why does your wife always stay at her parental home? Why do you always stay in the neighbouring village?"

"That is my will. If I live, as I like, there is no sin. Nor fault. Only if somebody separates them…."

"You say it is your wish… but the other day your wife told my wife and wept…. that you never stay at home…."

"Your wife too might be weeping that you stay at home, who knows?...People say that I don't stay at home….! Well, what does it matter if I do not stay? Cannot the woman stay back at home and take care of cattle and the like, plants and the like? Should the man always sit at home *like a cat near the hearth*?'

"Do you say I am not a man?"

"Who knows?"

"Stop, idiots! Rama is getting up," somebody shouted.

Rama rose up slowly, moaning.

"Tell me quickly what happened later."

"Thus…. Sita Devi with thighs like the banana trunks… beautiful breasts…."

"Stop! Stop! You can tell… But Rama is fainting…." While somebody was saying so, Rama fainted again!

Hanuman felt very much slighted. He felt shy that he was causing grief to Rama by telling about Sita Devi's sorrow. 'This time I will create something and tell him that Sita is happy', Hanuman thought.

"He might have committed a sin some day…. Otherwise, why this forest life!.... Why should he lose his wife! How much his soul is suffering in anguish!" said a pundit loudly.

The next moment, the soul searcher caught that pundit.

"Sir! What is soul'?....I have asked many people, but….."

"Oh! I would have cleared all your doubts a long time ago, had you asked me!"

"Yes, sir! At least now, I am fortunate to have your acquaintance… Please explain to me…'soul' means….."

"My lad! There is a 'body' isn't there?"

"Yes, sir! There is!"

"In it… In it… There is life… no.... here is an odd thing in it. That is soul…."

"What does it mean….?"

"Don't interrupt me, lad! Listen to me completely. A soul does not perish. It exists for ever!"

"If a body dies?"

"The soul stays on trees. Or….."

"On which tree?"

"On a tree a person likes. Suppose you like *Regu* trees. Your soul stays on Regu tree."

"Why?"

"Why do you ask me 'why'? It is because it eats Regu fruits"

"A soul has no body, has it? Then how will it eat? It should have a mouth, shouldn't it?"

"You have put me a very good question. Keep coming to my house! You will get knowledge about soul after a few years. Do you have any plants in your house?...."

"No sir. Tell me, how can the soul eat Regu fruits?"

"Regu fruits also fall down, don't they? Their souls also rise and go up on to the trees, don't they? Can't the soul then eat them?"

"If the souls of Regu fruits go to another tree…?"

"This soul will chase those souls and catch them. Understand? Now stop your questions. You seem to be a crazy man! You do not understand what I say. You have doubts for everything…"

The searcher of truth… disappeared a long while ago. He was already climbing down the hills.

This time it took longer for Rama to get up.

As soon as Rama got up, Hanuman saluted him respectfully. "Lord! Forgive me for my fault…Sita Devi is courageous. She is happy. That you will come soon and rescue her…."

Rama was shocked… leaning towards a side… he heard those last words and paused.

Hanuman was not clear as to what to say.

'Rama faints if I say Sita is grieving; he also faints if I say she is happy! All right, I will tell him things as they happened. This great man can grasp things', Hanuman thought.

Some elders observed Rama's condition and commented, "Some how today there are many fainting spells."

Hanuman resumed with some hesitation and fear. "Rama! That great woman was sitting with fear. Ravana came near and stood…"

"How near…" Rama's mind was inclined to ask. But, he remained silent.

"Ravana said, 'O beautiful lady! Why are you afraid of me? Don't hide your beauty… How can any man restrain himself without desiring a beautiful woman like you?"

"Yes, yes… True…." Said somebody absent-mindedly.

Rama looked that side from the corner of his eyes. Silence occupied that side.

Hanuman continued his narration with enthusiasm.

"'Decorate your self beautifully. Enjoy all my riches and wealth. Be my chief wife', Ravana began to beg…."

"What did Sita say, my lad!" said Rama, unable to withhold the question.

"*Mother* Sita did not even raise her head. She remained silent listening to him."

"Then................"

"That wicked man began to abuse you, Ramayya!"

Rama startled. "What? Me?"

"Yes, my lord! You… He said, 'That Rama is without a kingdom. He is useless before me. He cannot equal me in penance, wealth, valour or in any other thing. You might have committed some sin in the past birth. That is why you have lived in a forest for so long. How can you be happy with a man who has lost his kingdom? Hereafter, enjoy all the royal pleasures."

All the logicians there were fascinated at the logic of Ravana. One scholar argued with another scholar. "Yes. Each word of Ravana is true. Rama is inferior to Ravana in penance. Inferior also in wealth… What about in valour? Well, we have to wait and see. However, Hanuman said that Ravana was great in archery, isn't he? What is untrue in it when Ravana said that 'Rama is a fallen man'? A king who has lost his kingdom is a fallen man, isn't he? Rama is dreaming of getting back that kingdom and enjoy royal pleasures, isn't he? It is true that Sita has had no royal pleasures for the past fourteen years, isn't it? Rama is waiting for all this, isn't he? Ravana has also said the same thing. We cannot dismiss his words."

"Hanuman! Did Sita not say anything even then?" asked Rama calmly but with anger.

"Alas! Why not my lord! Though she kept quiet at the beginning, later she retorted angrily to every word of his. She abused that wicked man a lot. 'You should love your wives. Do not desire me. I do not even glance at any man other than my husband. Take me and hand me over to my husband. Otherwise my husband will destroy you completely.' But that wicked man did not fear!... Did not change his heart…."

"Then, what did he say?" somebody asked curiously

"That's what I was about to say. He sticks to his word. 'You are very beautiful. Your beauty is making me lose my mind and go mad. Manmadha is chasing me towards you with his flowery arrows. Be kind! Be merciful!' and in this manner he clamoured."

"Ah! Ah!" Pundits who write erotic poetry nodded their heads. "Ah! How romantically he asked! How pathetically he said, 'your beauty is making me lose my mind'!...Woman's beauty makes a man lose his mind, doesn't it?"

"Have you noticed another witty expression? Have you noticed the beauty in the expression, 'Manmadha (cupid) is chasing me towards you'? What if Ravana has many wives? What if many women are ready in their wings for him? His whole mind is pulling him towards this woman only. He does not desire another woman! Ah, how beautifully he described such a romantic state of mind!... He said, 'Manmadha is chasing me towards you'. That is what it is, isn't it? Is it not chasing? Is it not naughty behaviour of Manmadha?... What do you say?" — One romantic pundit to another!

"Oh! Yes, yes! Recalling it repeatedly, I am very delighted. Ravana is a great romantic fellow. Great emperor of sex! Ah! How pleasingly he put it!" The poets closed their eyes and went into ecstasy.

Rama seriously thought about the wickedness of Manmadha. Creating infatuation for Sita, he shot arrows at me. Is he also shooting at Ravana as well? What is this naughtiness? Even I — who observe traditions in the matters of enjoying sexual pleasures — am not able to control Manmadha! How can that Ravana — who is always immersed in pleasures in the company of beautiful women control himself? All this appears to be the conspiracy of Manmadha! If Manmadha resorts to this vile act…."

A discussion on the flowery arrows of Manmadha was going on among the people who sat at a distance.

"Why should Manmadha shoot flowery arrows at Ravana?" asked some one first.

"Sita is beautiful, isn't she? By shooting arrows, Manmadha is telling Ravana to desire Sita!"

"Utter stupidity. If she is so beautiful, Manmadha himself should desire her.… Why should he tell others?"

"Tut! Stop it. You do not know any thing. You are an utterly *jungle man*. Do you know, Manmadha has the most beautiful wife? She is *Rati Devi*. He simply helps people love each other….."

"Well, then, will he also throw arrows at Sita asking her to fall in love with Ravana?"

"Tut! Why will he throw them like that? If the husband is not near, he will not throw it on such women. He throws them on men at any time."

"What is this confusion? If he throws many arrows on Ravana and does not throw even a single arrow on Sita, how will he bring them together?"

"He should not bring them together"

"All right! Then why doesn't he stop throwing them on Ravana also?.... I think things will be set right if we first thrash Manmadha."

People at both the back and front shouted at these talkers, "You always talk. What a nuisance! Get away from here. You don't have sense."

The talkers shifted to whispering. "Shall we go?... Let's roam about for a while. Let's see if we can get *Neredu* fruits."

"Not now. We will go next time when Rama faints… Now, don't talk!"

"But… I have a word to say… I may forget it later. You said Manmadha helps all people to fall in love, didn't you?....Supposing Ravana abducts Manmadha's wife. Will he, then, throw arrows on Ravana?"

"Oh, what a doubt you have? We will ask some pundit. Stop…."

Hanuman continued his narration. He continued to narrate how Ravana described all the limbs of Sita. Ravana praised Sita's eyes and cheeks. He appreciated her hair, her chin. He said her thighs were beautiful….

Rama had not yet recovered from Manmadha's wickedness.

Ravana praised Sita's breasts a lot. "Oh, beautiful lady! Your breasts… beautiful… round… strong…. big…."

Rama recovered a bit and was shocked. "Breasts?.... What breasts? How could he see her breasts?" Rama became furious. Immediately he realised his mistake and said calmly, "Sita Devi... always.... covers her bosom with the upper part of the sari...." He frowned a little bit.

Afraid of Rama's anger, Hanuman folded his hands obediently. "Lord! It is no fault of Sita Devi. When she tied up her ornaments... in that hurry.... she had torn an arm or two arms length of cloth from the sari, hadn't she? After that, the remaining sari too was torn here and there and so she found it difficult as it was not enough to cover her whole body. As that wicked man looked at her thighs, she pulled her sari down up to her feet. This time, as it was not possible to cover her shoulders... as the sari was not enough... her breasts were seen."

Sugriva asked angrily, "Did that wicked man not give even saris?"

"Oh, no! Why sinful talk. We have to speak truthfully. He gave them to her. But Sita Devi refused to wear them."

"Oh, I see!...." Sugriva cooled down. He turned aside and said to Nila, "It would have been better if she had worn them. What do you say?

Nila *made a chewing noise* disapprovingly, "How will it look nice, your Excellency!... She is a devoted wife, isn't she?"

Debate flared up among the people over this issue.

Some said, "It would have been better, if she had worn the saris he gave her."

Others said, "How will it be nice? Stupid fellow! Will it be nice if she wore saris, which her abductor had offered her? How much an outsider can slight her if she had accepted?"

"Then... with that single sari... showing the entire body.... how long can she stay like that?"

"It is all in your imagination. Even if she had covered her body, do you think he will stop describing her body? However much she covers her body, he would say, 'Your breasts are beautiful; your buttocks are beautiful." It is his mentality!.... He imagines something and prattles on. Do you think Sita Devi showed him her lower belly and thighs?.... He praised them as well, didn't he?"

"What you said is also true. One should be adamant.... Let him see the body.... But she should not wear the clothes that he gives. True. .... If it were my wife, she would happily wear them without hesitation. She would have changed at least ten saris a day.... She would even ask him to get more!"

"Yes, yes. But you never bought her even a small piece of cloth, did you?"

"I buy a pair of saris a year. How many does she need? You are defending her because she is your cousin. That craze for saris and craze for jewellery won't leave her unless somebody like Ravana abducts her."

Hanuman did not leave Ravana.

Ravana did not leave Sita. Not just Sita, but her breasts.

Ravana was unable to move his eyes from the waist of Sita. He was saying, 'As you have become thin due to grief, your waist has become much thinner and you are looking very beautiful like a crescent moon."

Somebody was praising Ravana. "Yes. He said it correctly. It is true. My grand father too used to say, '*even if a beautiful woman becomes thin, still she is beautiful. A fine cloth looks beautiful even if it is torn*'. Do elders say things just like that?" A gentleman was praising all the elders.

It was all confusing for Rama. He was unable to decide whether he should feel happy for Sita becoming thin or for looking more beautiful after she had become thin; whether he should feel happy for Sita not wearing saris which another man offered or for showing her entire body to him?"

Why should she tear the sari? Would it not have been all right if she had thrown the jewellery on some grass?.... Why did she send Lakshmana away instead of asking him to stay on in the cottage?... In fact, why should she have come to the forest without heeding my advice?... How safe women would be if they stayed in harems? How respectable it would be! Would then all these hardships pounce on us?' As he thought further, Rama's head became heavy with anger at Sita. He was tempted to faint. He raised his head as Hanuman was telling him something.

"Gather courage Rama! Sita Devi abused that sinful fellow fearlessly. But, did he care? That wicked man said, 'See my fame, see my wealth. I will not tolerate it if you utter Rama's name. Hereafter you are the wife of Ravana. If you are sensible, be happy with me." Hanuman bent his head as if he had made a mistake by uttering those words.

"Is Sita shrewd?" Whispers began again.

"May be she is shrewd! Why not?"

"Will she live happily with Ravana?"

"Tut! What is this talk?"

"Will she not be stupid if she doesn't live happily?"

Some priests looked amazed. "Why does that man call her Ravana's wife without a marriage? It is atrocious! Then, what value will a marriage ceremony have?" They lamented a lot.

"Then, what did Sita Devi say?" asked Sugriva curiously.

Hanuman said with enthusiasm, "She said in such a way that he would feel ashamed!... 'Ravana! You have riches and wealth but no good conduct. If you had it, you would also have been a good man', she said."

"Will he become a good man?" Rama looked angrily from the corners of his eyes.

"....'My husband is not a wicked man like you. He is a man of all good qualities. Born due to a great boon. Shall I abandon such a noble man?', she said well. Yet... between you and me... Ravana too was born due to a boon. He said, 'Not only Rama, I was also born due to a boon!'...." Hanuman paused to observe every body's face with a smile to ascertain whether every body was surprised or not.

"Was Ravana too born due to a boon?" Rama is surprised.

People were racking their brains, "Who is that god who gave a boon to this wicked man?"

"Ravana was not yet born by the time the god gave the boon, was he? He might have thought Ravana would be a good man. Poor fellow, how could he know about it?"

"Yes, true. God gave a boon to the parents of Ravana."

"I too was born due to a boon, they say...." A gentle man said with a little bit of shy. "Not only you. Even I was born due to a boon. In fact, as I was not born for a long time, my mother prayed to *Nagendra*, the god of snakes, and one day, Nagendra appeared to my grand father near a mound of earth in our field and...."

"What is it?.... How come he appeared to your grand father when your mother prayed?"

"I don't know. Is it his will or our will? He appeared on the mound of the earth in the field and disappeared. After some days, he again appeared in a dream and told my grand father, 'A very good grand son will be born to you. He will be a very great grandson. Ten years after that I was born....."

The gentleman sitting to the left of the listener was narrating that he was born due to the boon of *Ganapati*.

Some people sitting behind were born due to *Parvati*'s boon. Many people were already born due to *Eswara*'s boon.

"Eswara's boon is not that great. It does not have much power."

"Why doesn't it have power? In fact, Parvati's boon does not have much power... Tomorrow if you face any hardship, how can a woman rescue you?.... If it is a male god...."

On the whole it was clear that all the people there were born due to boons. There was no one who was born due to their parents!

Seeing Nila, Sugriva said with a smiling face, "....I too....due to boon...."

"Yes, sir!....I too due to the boon of goddess of hill..."

"I see!...All right" Sugriva turned away his head.

"Sita Devi became furious, her eyes red and asked *very well*, 'Ravana! You say you are a great valorous man. Why did you come when my husband was not there and then bringing me here secretly?" — said Hanuman and looked all the people with a smiling face.

"I see! So she asked...." Many people, especially logicians, felt happy.

"Sita Devi is very wise!....What did king Ravana say then?"

"Well, what is the great deed that your husband does? Did he not catch my sister alone and got her nose and ears cut?", he asked very aptly —" said Hanuman but realising his mistake at once, he turned his head aside.

Rama frowned. 'Tut! This Lakshmana does not think what is good and what is bad if he got angry. Why should he cut the nose and ears of that girl? It would have been enough if he had thrashed her and sent her away.... See, how we have to face such questions....! Rama's mind is confused. He felt like fainting every now and then.

Among the audience, *palatal sounds of sympathy* are heard for the sake of nose and ears of Surpanakha.

"Poor girl! What is this.... catching a girl and cutting off her nose?.... Should her husband live with her or not?"

"Yeah!.... Did he stop at cutting off the nose? Why the hell did he cut off her ears as well?"

"In fact it was better to cut off ears. Why cut off the nose?.... Hell with him...."

"You lament about the nose only... Do you think ears are unnecessary?"

"Nay! One should have ears too, but the nose is more important, isn't it?"

"These brothers say, 'We are men of justice! We are men of justice!'... It seems they have the mentality of harassing some one or the other... Nasty mentality! Ravana has done very well!"

"Sh! Stop talking. Hell with you! Chatting like a *Vasa* bird....Ravana talks well. You don't let us hear a single word..."

Ravana ridiculed Sita, "You say, 'my husband is great!' Why hasn't he rescued you for so long?" Ravana is asking Sita, twirling his moustache.

Rama slowly fell down and fainted. "Let's us go. We will come back again when he gets up." Some people get up quickly.

Seeing those who get up, some more people got up.

Those who sat there lowered their voice and said, "Ravana's question is reasonable.... This man is fainting every moment out of his love for the wife, isn't he?... Then why has he not brought her back till now?"

"How can he get her back?.... Do you think battle is such an easy matter?... What he can do is to faint!.... Or cut noses if he finds women!"

"Don't say that loudly. It doesn't sound nice..."

Those who had got up roamed along the trees. Some went to a nearby stream to drink water. Some people talked about domestic problems.

"Come on, come on!...." Those who sat there called those who were at a distance. "Rama has got up... come on!"

By the time all people returned, Hanuman had narrated a lot. Rama listened and nodded.

"What did Sita say in response to Ravana's ridicule?" Those who had come just then asked those who had come before them.

"She said, 'Death has not approached you'. *Sin should ripe* for any one, shouldn't it?"

As he heard how well Sita had abused Ravana, Rama's heart felt lighted.

"My lad! That wicked man... I hope.... has not physically harassed her? At what distance did he stand from her?" Rama asked the question that had pricked him for a long time.

"Oh, no! Why should I utter sinful words... he has not physically harassed her. He treated her with affection like a pet parrot. He does not get angry although Sita Devi abuses him! While she abuses him, he smiles a lot as if it were enough if she utters some thing?...."

Rama's anger at Sita increased gradually.

He became pensive. 'Why talk so much with a stranger? Can't she just utter one word and then stop talking?'

"My lad! At what dista….."

"That is what I was saying, Ramayya! Hanuman looked hither and thither and said, "Look, over there. At a distance from here to where Mainda sat…. Nay! Not so much distance…. yeah…. he stood as near as Tarudu sat…. yeah…. yeah…" Hanuman estimated the distance repeatedly.

Rama got uncontrollably angry with Tarudu because he had sat so close.

"Go ahead…. What happened next?" asked Sugriva, coming back just then after his whispers with others.

"What happened, Your Excellency? That man did not give up his word, this woman did not give up her word. Ravana tried to convince and request her, 'How long will you wait for your husband? Your *age is passing away wastefully*. Will the current of water flow back?.... Heed my words….?"

This time, Ravana's logic appeared more reasonable to logicians. "Yes, yes! It is true. If days pass, will they return?...No! Not even a single moment will come back even if we ask…." They nodded. For poets, that simile is more fascinating.

"Have you grasped the beauty in it?" they looked at each other's face.

"He said age is wasting away, didn't he? Age means, youth, isn't it?... Oh! He compared youth with the current of water!... A very good simile, you know!... What do you say?"

"Ravana is also a well read man! Is he an ordinary man? He knows every thing… rules of grammar on the one hand and poetic beauty on the other. Can any body *open* his *mouth* and say anything better after his comparing youth with the current of water in a stream?....one must accept it!"

Poets and pundits wondered at the scholarship of Ravana.

A gentleman had a doubt suddenly which he had not had until then. "Why the hell did Ravana beg her so much?... Do you find a man anywhere begging a woman?"

"Stupid fellow! What do you know? What about fondling? He was asking her with fondness."

"What sort of fondness is this? So many months? We have not known this kind of fondness in our family. Neither our fathers nor our grand fathers ever begged a woman. How shameless the men of Ravana's family…"

Hanuman was about to say how shameful Ravana's family was.

Ravana got angry.

Ravana became furious since Sita had refused to heed him despite his begging and threats in various ways.

"He said to Sita, 'All right! I will give you two months' time."

"What!... Two months?... When she had not listened to me all these days, will she heed later? This is like a game! Why does he not leave her?"

"If you don't agree, I will sentence you to death' said Ravana."

Rama jerked, "Death sentence? To Sita?"

Lakshmana was shocked, "Death sentence? To my sister-in-law?"

All were startled, "Death sentence!"

The pundits were surprised, "No man has a woman killed if he is infatuated to her!"

"Did he simply threaten her?" Some sex poets found it strange. "Why did he beg her for so long without troubling her and even touching her? Then why is such a person — who treats her with such fondness — threatening to kill her? This seems to be extraordinary in the history of sex."

"Dejection emerges out of sex, you know!... Revenge intermingled with infatuation…. What do you say?"

"Yes, it seems so"

Shedding tears, Rama lowered his head.

Sugriva held Rama's hands and began to console him. "Sri Rama! Don't worry. Can't we rescue Sita Devi within the two month deadline?... That wicked man's life is only two months now. That is why he has given only two months time. Listen to me. We have many experienced warriors. Now we have to start for battle, plan every thing."

These few words gave Rama *strength of a thousand elephants*. He sighed deeply.

"*Lad*! Tell me what happened next?"

Hanuman also recovered from his sorrow.

"Lord! Ravana left the place warning all the maids to make Sita have a change of heart somehow."

"Did he leave?"

"He left, my lord!"

"Did he leave?"

"Yes, he left my lord!"

"Did he come back again? Left her completely…?"

"Nay! He did not come again. He left her completely."

Rama sighed deeply.

"What if that wicked man left! Wicked people gathered around Sita!"

"Again, who are those wicked people?"

"Those…. maids…. They all began to repeat Ravana's words. 'Ravana is a king, isn't he? Why do you reject such a man? What does Rama possess? He does not have even a cawrie… Why did your father arrange such an alliance?' ", they ridiculed her.

Shaking with anger, Lakshmana roared, "Do maids also have such arrogance? Hanuman! When we go to Lanka, show me all of them. I will catch them and cut off their noses and ears."

Rama said coolly, "No, Lakshmana! Those maids are discharging their duties. It seems that Ravana has faithful servants."

"In this manner, Sita Devi did not at all agree, however much maids persuaded her. She said, 'I will not do as you say, even if you kill me."

Love for Sita over flowed in Rama's heart suddenly like a flood.

"Ramayya! Meanwhile, a maid called Trijata came and told about a very good dream."

"Dream? Nay, we cannot. Believe it." Sugriva dismissed it. Sugriva had dreams many a time that Vali had sat on the throne."

Hanuman began to narrate the whole dream of Trijata with enthusiasm. "Ramayya!.... In a big chariot, you and Lakshmana went to Lanka, she said. Sita Devi got into the chariot. Again, you went on an elephant. Sita Devi sat on the elephant. Again, you went on some thing… Ah, yeah, on bullock cart. Ravana, his relatives, brothers — every body sat on donkeys and pigs and went to hell. But a brother called Vibhishana sat on an elephant and went to heaven!...."

"Why?.... Why did Vibhishana alone go to heaven?" asked Sugriva.

"He is a virtuous man, your Excellency! I will tell you everything in order…."

Rama was surprised *inside his heart*. Why did a Rakshasa-woman have such a dream? Therefore, he would win the battle!.... Every thing seemed to be the decision of god.

Those who sat at a distance were chitchatting about dreams.

"Dreams that you have early in the morning surely come true. Once I had a dream that our *Anapa* creeper had borne a tender fruit. After four days, it really bore a tender fruit."

"I will not believe it under any circumstances."

"What? You don't believe that our Anapa creeper bore the fruit?"

"Not that."

"That I had a dream"

"Nay! Not that. Once I had a dream that I got a lump of gold as big as a washerman's pot. I had the dream early in the morning. But so far I have not got the gold. I haven't got even a little: *as little as a small black bead*."

"You might have thought that it was early in the morning. However, it might not have been early in the morning. Otherwise, why didn't you get gold?... Our Anapa creeper….."

The gentle man who had had that gold dream *fell into a doubt* that it might not have been early in the meaning!

All the maids went to sleep.

Hanuman talked to Sita.

Sita did not believe Hanuman. She suspected even Hanuman as Ravana.

Rama jerked and looked angrily, "You said Ravana had left?"

"Sita Devi suspected that he might have come in disguise."

"Did he used to come like that?"

"Ah, yes, many times…."

"Then did he ever….. in my guise……"

Hanuman thought for a long while. "I didn't ask, Ramayya! The wicked man must have come."

Rama burnt with anger.

Hanuman continued his narration. "So, that great lady thought that some one there had come to deceive her and could not believe me at first… She suspected me however much I told her….." Then Hanuman began to smile thinking that people would now hear about his great deeds.

"Then why didn't you show her the ring as soon as you went to her?" Somebody shouted loudly.

Lakshmana also asked the same thing angrily, "Didn't you show the ring which my brother had given you?"

Hanuman startled for a while, stopped smiling and said, "Yeah, yeah…. On seeing Sita Devi, in that joy, I had forgotten about it. Of course, I showed it to her later. She felt very happy. She shed tears. She enquired about the welfare of all people. 'Is my husband safe?.... Is my brother-in-law safe? Do you hear any news of Kosala? …. Why has my husband ignored me so long? If he is anxious to take me back, why does he delay so much?... Why has he kept quiet so long without coming to rescue me?' She wailed and asked me complainingly, Rama!"

Rama was about to faint. However, he just leant and kept quiet. "She has learnt logic well. None can match her in questioning…. Oh! What is this Hanuman…. He doesn't think about say thing… What to any in public and what not to…"

People gathered over there wondered.

"When Ravana asked the same thing, she said, "My husband is not doing anything because your time isn't up yet. Again why does she ask, 'why has my husband not rescued me?'…..So, the reason for Rama not rescuing his wife so far is not that Ravana's time is not up yet!....Then, what must the reason be? There is some secret in it…."

"There is no other reason…. Till recently it was the rainy season!"

"What! Were all the ten months rainy season? Rainy season was over and the plants perished. Do you actually know months and seasons….?"

"Ah! You know them pretty well…." The discussion ended in the beginning with a quarrel.

Hanuman told Sita with reverence why Rama had not rescued his wife. "*Mother*! Your husband is *sunk in sorrow* for you and has forgotten to rescue you. He sank in the sea of sorrow for you, became helpless and has forgotten himself. — This is what I said, Ramayya!"

Rama felt like embracing Hanuman at once. "You protected my reputation, my lad!" — He was about to say so but restrained himself and protected his reputation himself.

Hanuman began to narrate how Sita Devi grieved. "She grieved and grieved and finally sighed, 'All this is the result of my past deeds! What can any body do?'

This is like a revelation to all those who were wondering why Rama had not rescued his wife thus far.

"So this is the result of Sita's past deeds! What can even Rama do? However, great he may be, he has to surrender to the strength of the result of the past deeds," said the gentleman — who had quarrelled a while ago — in a loud voice to a gentleman beside him so that his adversary could hear it. Though the adversary had heard all these words, he kept quiet — unable to question the result of the past deeds.

After Sita acknowledged the impact of the result of her past deeds, Rama's mind became very light. "What more did my Sita say?"

"Ramayya! She also asked, 'Will Bharata send armies?'

Rama wondered first. Later he became angry. 'Why all these issues for a woman?... What does Hanuman know even if she asked him, 'Will Bharata send armies?'…. Well, this man…. Did he keep quiet after he heard all this? Hanuman said this in the presence of all the people. What will Sugriva say tomorrow? 'Ask Bharata to send some army. I'll give some army'. If he says so….? That is why elders say that women should not interfere in important matters. "Tell me my lad!...Tell me what more Sita said. Tell me every thing. She must be facing many hardships, mustn't she? Daily amidst those wicked people…."

"When you say, 'Wicked people, I remember one thing. Rama! Some people treat Sita with reverence…. Vibhishana's daughter keeps coming to Sita and talk to her secretly. Vibhishana's wife sends her daughter to go and talk to Sita. Vibhishana does not at all like Ravana to resort to such wicked behaviour. Vibhishana asks his brother daily to release Sita Devi….."

Rama listened with wonder. He looked Hanuman with widened eyes. His mind was actively doing its duty. 'So, Ravana's younger brother is opposed to Ravana?... Why is Vibhishana showing so much interest in Sita? Why? What could the reason be? What should I assume? Is it merely goodness? Or is there any politics? Does Vibhishana not like Ravana's actions?.... What is there that is new to dislike?.... Ravana's actions have always been so, haven't they?... Has he opposed them all the time?... Or like Sugriva, is he expecting state power from his elder brother?... This is surprising! I should not make up my mind unless I hear the whole thing…'

"Yes, tell me my lad! So, are there good people even among those wicked people?"

"You will see later how good Vibhishana is… I was thus talking to Sit*amma* about her welfare. I asked her, '*Mother*! What do you want me to tell your husband?' That great woman wailed and told me that episode about that crow….."

'Why about a crow?' — Rama was in a hurry to know about Vibhishana.

"Once when both of you were lying under a tree in *Chitrakuta*, a crow pecked Sita Devi. She narrated all that with fondness….."

Rama frowned a little. Instead of telling him in detail about that Vibhishana and what his daughter spoke, why did she talk about the crow and sparrow?... What is new in the pecking of a crow?... It has kicked me on my head so many times. Who remembers all that?"

The sex poets are feeling unhappy over the crow episode. "Such a beautiful woman… such a youthful woman… A woman who has been suffering a long period of separation…. on an occasion when she ought to remind her husband sweet memories…. should have reminded him incidents when a parrot pecked her cheek or when a pigeon sat in her lap… is it the cries of crows and kicks of donkeys that one should reminisce about?"

"It seems Sita Devi has little knowledge of *Sringara sastra* (science of romance)."

"You are right…It seems so"

People there are telling each other about the crow: whom did it peck, whom did it kick and how many times and so on.

"Once when I bandaged my whitlow… a bloody crow pounced upon it and carried it away. The nail too went off. I cried with convulsions like a child," a gentleman *put a crying face*.

All agreed that crows do the most horrible things.

Hanuman took leave of Sita Devi and started from there. "I was thinking how to cross the Asoka vana. I do not know how they saw me, they began to chase me. I picked up big boulders and threw them at them. Two or three ellows died.”

“Died!” Sugriva is worried.

“Ah, yes! The stone hit their temples and hey died.”

“Hanuman throws stones very well hitting he targets”, said Sugriva with a smile.

“Did they not catch you?” asked Nila.

“Of course they did. They dragged me to Ravana. I thought that that was my end. Ravana's minister asked me, ‘Who are you, why ave you come and what is the matter?’ ”

“What did you tell then?.... My goodness!” ugriva was worried.

“Why not? I told him every thing. I eprimanded him, “Be sensible. Leave Sita Devi lone. Otherwise, Rama and Sugriva will come ere, kill you and take away Sita. Don't ruin anka.”

Tumult started among the audience there: undits and rural folk.

“They must have killed Sita by now”, said ome one.

“They won't kill her but Ravana himself night be making preparations for a battle gainst Rama.”

“Tell me… I do not understand… suppose he guards came to catch him. Why should he eat them to death? Couldn't have said, ‘See, I ame for this job.’ Any way he wanted to tell bout it, didn't he? When Sita is in their ustody…. why should he act in such a way hat danger has befallen her?”

“He went such a long distance with great ffort. What is the use? He spoiled the whole hing and *it is like protecting the crop until it is ipe and leaving it for foxes thereafter*.”

“How did he come out of their custody?”

Lakshmana felt like pouncing upon him. ‘If e knew that we are making arrangements to ake away Sita, will Ravana keep quiet? What anger will befall my sister-in-law?’ He felt like ending Hanuman's back and thrash him to eath.

Sugriva was also burning with anger and hispered in Nila's ear.” In fact, I had asked im only to observe the situation….”

Rama was lost in deep thought. ‘Hanuman has returned safely, hasn't he? Something favourable must have happened. We should not decide anything without hearing completely.

Hanuman was startled. He was surprised why people, instead of praising him, were looking at him as if he had made a mistake.

Rama asked him calmly, “Hanuman! Tell us. What happened in the assembly of Ravana?”

Hanuman got lot of courage, on seeing Rama's patience. He said enthusiastically, “Ravana ordered his men to kill me.”

“Did they kill you?” one or two people in the audience shouted.

“Then… Vibhishana… that pious man… prayed to his brother that he should not kill a messenger. At the beginning, Ravana would not agree but…. did Vibhishana stop his effort? Oh, he said many things. Then Ravana had no other way but to agree…. So, he said, “All right! Give him some punishment and leave him.”

“Then what punishment did they give you? Did they put you in the prison?”

Hanuman did not answer. He felt shy. Smiling a while, he remained silent.

“They might have given him lashes. How can he tell us about it?”

“Nay, they might have put marks on his buttocks with a burning rod! See…. he is unable to sit properly…. I was wondering all the while what it was.”

“Once in the village of my grand father…. they caught a thief and ….”

For logicians, Vibhishana's logic seemed very surprising. ‘The messenger did not behave like a messenger, did he? No. He jumped like a ghost and killed their soldiers. Yet, this Vibhishana argued that this man was a messenger and let him off!... What is this?’

“One can show mercy but such illogical mercy is not proper. What do you say?”

“Yes, it surprises me too.”

“It seems there are no logicians in Ravana's assembly.”

“Yes, yes. It seems so.”

All the sex poets remained silent ignoring that it was not their subject matter for discussion.

Rama's thoughts were coming to an end. His entire heart was becoming sea of joy. What it meant if Vibhishana had not got angry even when a culprit who harassed their own men?... He had saved a man, who had not behaved like a messenger, by citing ethics that rescue a messenger. This means Vibhishana is expecting some thing in return for rescuing Hanuman. Moreover, he is encouraging his brother to wage a battle against his enemy. If I see all this, it seems that Vibhishana is totally opposed to Ravana. It means he is not at all loyal to his brother. That is why, Vibhishana's wife is showing so much interest in Sita. As a battle would be inevitable due to Sita, it seems Vibhishana is trying to use this opportunity. It gives me confidence that Vibhishana will surely be on my side when the time comes for the battle. It is very clear that he is not his brother's side. Again,…. this is the same case as Vali and Sugriva. A quarrel between brothers for the sake of 'state power'!

It seems Ravana has complete confidence in his brother. So, Ravana is not aware that one should keep an eye on whether it is elder brother or younger brother in matters of riches and wealth.[330]

It is evident how stupid he is from the fact that he let off Hanuman… May be it is not stupidity! Perhaps, arrogance that none can do anything to him!

Now I see the meaning of Trijata's dream. If Ravana went to hell, Vibhishana went to heaven. This means the two have enmity…. In fact, Trijata might be a loyal servant of Vibhishana!... She might have fabricated a dream in order to frighten those maidservants and rescue Sita from them! But…. if that dream turns out false…. If his victory and Ravana's defeat… If every thing becomes…. Let's see…. reality is very favourable to me, isn't it?..... What is the loss even if a dream is fabricated? — Smile is glittering on Rama's face.

All people are surprised.

While all people are anxious about what danger befalls Sita due to Hanuman's crazy action….smiles on Rama's face!

"Poor fellow! His mind might have been disturbed!"

"Yes, how many hardships can he bear!"

"Stop non-sense. Though he killed our Vali *day before yesterday*…You are forgetting every thing and showing sympathy to him. You don't have shame!"

"Yes, yes! We have already forgotten…. Moreover he is forcing war on us….. Let us be careful this time. Let us not be sympathetic."

Smiles are trickling on the face of Rama however much he tried to hide them.

'Have I reported every thing?' Hanuman tried to recall all the things for himself. "By the by, Ramayya! I forgot to tell you one thing. As I could not bear Sita Devi's grief, I thought of bringing her along with me… But…."

Ram jerked. He looked at Hanuman seriously. He laid many hopes on Lanka. After knowing about Vibhishana, he was getting confidence that all his hopes will be fulfilled. He was very ambitious to acquire Lanka by destroying Ravana completely. He felt happy that Ravana's abduction of Sita had taken place for the good. Had Hanuman himself brought Sita…. my goodness… what would have happened? Every thing would have been reversed. Then where would the question of war arise? Or victory in the war? Thank god… he has not brought her. On seeing Hanuman, Rama's body is burning with anger. Had he brought her?.... I would have told him without any hesitation. I would have ordered, 'I won't allow. Take her back and keep her there. I, myself, will get her. What did I tell you and what have you done? No, I will not allow this…. Take Sita back and hand her back to Ravana! I

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330. We will know, as we proceed further, how Rama suspects Bharata and keeps a vigilant eye on him in respect of property.

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will kill that man and I will myself get her back. Who are you to bring my wife here?... What will happen to my fame and reputation? I will myself get her. Take her away first.'

Rama got some peace after he had the thought that it was possible to send Sita back to Lanka even if Hanuman had brought her back to him.[331]

Hanuman looked forward expecting that Rama would appreciate him.

Rama lowered his head and tried to fill his eyes up with tears. "You should have brought her, my lad!.... You should have reunited Sita and me."

Hanuman said with reverence, "Lord! I would have surely brought her. But that great woman did not agree to come…"

"What? Did she not agree to come here?" Rama was startled.

"Not like that… She said she would not come along with another man. She said, 'I could not do any thing because Ravana forcibly carried me away… but I will not come willingly with another man. My husband alone should come here, destroy Lanka and take me back. It is a matter of his reputation and mine if my husband comes and takes me back."

Rama felt indescribable love for Sita for she had not come away hastily with Hanuman.

It seems that this logic appealed to logicians. They nodded their heads.

The sex poets were lost in thought. "Desiring more romantic separation. Within this long separation…. What category of state of mind does this belong?" the poets looked at each other's face.

"No! This is not at all there in sexology! It may perhaps belong to some other science…."

"Did you not hear attentively?.... She said, 'If my husband takes me, it will be a matter of fame for him and a matter of fame for me'…. If we go by this expression…."

"Then, what is the problem?....This comes under the *science of itching for fame*!"

"Poor fellows, do these rural folk understand all these intricacies?...they listen attentively"

The rural folks were really confused about Sita's attitude.

"If it were my wife? She would have cried and ran behind Hanuman"

"My wife too would have done the same. She cares *neither for stranger nor graveyard.* The other day, she went for *Jatara* (a rural religious festival where animals are sacrificed) along with her paternal aunt's son. *I thought of beating her to death*, but kept quiet as she might got back to her parents' home."

"Our wives?...Where do they stand in comparison with Sita? She is a great woman."

Hanuman tried to recollect if he had forgotten anything. Seeing Sugriva, he said, "Your Excellency! I frightened Ravana by mentioning your name. I said, 'Sugriva alone is enough to kill you. I said, 'Sugriva will see your end'. That fellow was frightened, you know!" Hanumana looked at every body with a smiling face.

We do not know about Ravana's fear but Sugriva was frightened and moved back.

Nila, who was sleeping behind, said irritably in his sleep, "Ugh! Why do you fall on me? Tut!"

Sugriva was unable to control his anger. "Hell with your sleep! It seems you won't stop sleeping unless I hang you." Sugriva became furious. He leaned towards Jambavan's ears and said very irritably, "What is this? How can I kill Ravana alone?.... Is it proper to talk like that?... When we sent him to do a job, he has to do it! What is this foolish talk? Will not Ravana get angry with me?....I do not understand this. He has made a mess of every thing."

Hanuman once again recalled every thing that he had seen in Lanka. He expressed

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331. In case Hanuman had brought Sita from Lanka....How will be Rama's thoughts?...Will he get angry at Sita or not? Will he get angry at Hanuman or not. Think about it. ★

surprise, "There are Brahmins, even in Lanka, you know?"

"Brahmins?" Some pundits moved forward. "What are Brahmins doing?"

"They read the Vedas."

"Aha! Is it so? What a nice thing you have told us! That is why Lanka still exists."

Unable to control his enthusiasm, Rama asked nodding, "Do they read Vedas? *Siksha*, grammar, prosody, *Niyuktam*, Astrology, *Kalpam* — Do they read everything carefully?" Some how Rama had a lot of confidence that Brahmins who read the Vedas would join his side instead of Ravana's.

Hanuman was swinging with enthusiasm. "In fact, I wanted to kill Ravana myself, Ramayya! But, thinking that it would be better if you do that job, I didn't do it."

Rama was shocked. "What? Will Hanuman kill Ravana, occupy Lanka and keep me under his control?... One should not believe ministers and commanders who have so much capacity and keep quiet. I should keep an eye on this Hanuman!"

Hanuman did not remember anything else to tell further, however much he tried to recall it. "Sri Rama! I have submitted every thing to you. Why so many words?... Your wife is a great devoted wife. She is, as she ought to be in your absence. She has requested me to tell you repeatedly that you should bring her back soon. She told me to tell you — while Sugriva also hears — that she would live only for one month"

"Only one month!...But a while ago, you said two months?" Rama looked serious.

"Nay! The deadline that Ravana gave her is two months. However, Sita Devi said she would wait for you for one month and die if you do not show up by then. She said that I should tell you this while Sugriva was present...."[332]

Rama looked at Sugriva complainingly as if he had said, "What do you say? See, how much you have delayed!"

Sugriva quickly lowered his head and looked at Nila. Nila was still asleep. Sugriva's anger at Nila turned to Sita. Slowly, he moved towards Jambavan. "She does not know me — *not even my nose or face*. Why should she ask him to speak while I hear? If she wanted, she should have sent a word to her husband. It seems she would like to complain later if some thing different happens...." He said irritably.

Jambavan tried to convince the king calmly. "No, not like that. Because you are the one who will help... She must have said so to appeal to your kindness. She suffers hardships.... Somehow we have to rescue her... How will it be possible for Rama single handedly....?"

"Of course, yes. Did I say, 'no'?.... Rama always behaves as if he were saying, 'For whom will you do it? It is your duty!' That is why, I feel annoyed."

"Let him say it. Do not feel hurt. He killed Vali for our sake, didn't he? Let us also carry

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332. Sundara kanda, sarga 65, sloka 21 or 23:

"Sita Devi said, 'I will not live more than a month. Tell these words while Sugriva listens and hand this Chudamani to Rama", says Hanuman to Rama. However, when Sita talked to Hanuman in Asoka vana, she did not say, "Tell these words while Sugriva listens." Why did the poet write something, which he had not written in the scene in which Sita spoke — while Hanuman was speaking in the presence of Rama and Sugriva. What is the purpose in informing Sugriva specifically that 'Sita will not live more than a month?' It is to make Sugriva feel that it is his responsibility to rescue Sita so that he will not be careless as in the past and begin the battle soon. Without Sugriva's army, Rama cannot do this job. Everything is dependent on Sugriva. Only in order to make Sugriva do this job, the poet made Hanuman say this in this scene.

After returning from Lanka and crossing the sea, while telling all Vanaras, Hanuman said, "Sita told me she would live for two months." Two months in that scene. One month in this scene!

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out our promise and send him away...."

By the time Sugriva turned that side and looked at Rama, Rama had fainted.

"So, we have to go to the battle in a month!" Tumult among the people.

"Ravana is better. He gave two months' time. Whereas Sita Devi...only one month...."

"It seems she gave one month's time perhaps thinking that Sugriva would be careless during these two months as he was all these days."

"What does it matter whether it is one month or two months? All of us are destined to die...."

"If Vali were alive, we would not have had the menace of this battle."

Rama woke up from the faint and wailed. "My lad, Hanuman! Take me to my Sita. Take me to my love. My dutiful wife is far from me. Fate has slighted me. God is merciless. My wife has become helpless even if she has a husband like me.... Having lost the kingdom... having lost the husband... facing hardships..."

"Lord! It is not fair to grieve so much. I had consoled Sita Devi in many ways. That great lady is bold and has great hopes in you." Hanuman instilled courage in Rama.

Consoling Rama, Sugriva talked like an elderly person. "Sri Rama! If you grieve, I cannot bear it. Heed my words. Every thing will go off smoothly. We shall start at once for the battle. We will kill that wicked man.... We will rescue Sita Devi and bring her here. Listen to me... I swear again..."

[Here ends, 'Sundara kanda' Next begins, 'Yuddha kanda']

After wailing a lot, Rama slowly cooled down. "My lad, Hanuman! You have done a great deed, which nobody could have done. You have accomplished the assigned task. I am very happy." He looked at Hanuman with appreciation.

Feeling shy, Hanuman lowered his head in humility.

"There are different categories among servants. The best servant is one who accomplishes a task-assigned by the master — however difficult it may be and without feeling that it was a difficult task; and carrying out carefully and enthusiastically, other tasks which benefit the master. A mediocre servant is one who carries out only an assigned task and does not do more work even though he knows it would benefit the master. A base servant is one who in spite of his ability does not carryout the task of his master.[333]

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333. Yuddha kanda, sarga 1, slokas 8 to 10: See how Rama is classifying servants into different categories. A servant is called the best servant if he accomplishes a difficult task assigned by his master. A servant is called mediocre if he accomplishes only the assigned task but does not do the work, which the master had not assigned even though he is capable of doing it, and is aware that his master will be happy if he did it. A servant is called base if he does not accomplish any task which his master assigns him even though he is capable of doing it." Thus, there are three categories among the servants! What will a servant gain if he is given the title 'best servant'? His life will never be free from that servitude. It will immensely benefit only the master. The master will thus find a servant who remains loyal like a dog and do the drudgery like a beast of burden. As it is not always possible to make servants work by punishing, threatening and subduing them, there must be a system whereby servants willingly do the work. This is a principle that makes the servants do more labour in order to be called the 'best servants'. This is the secret of the 'best servants'. If poor people listen to some puranic recital about Sri Rama's praises for Hanuman that 'you are the best servant. All those people are the best people if they do more service to their master loyally', then they form a view that they ought to serve their masters more faithfully. ➔

Hanuman is the very best servant of Sugriva. He accomplished many tasks skilfully and carefully…."

Hanuman felt very embarrassed.

"By seeing Sita and telling me the happy news, Hanuman has saved my life. Otherwise, I would have given up my life. If I had given up my life, Lakshmana also would have given up his life. The entire Raghu dynasty would have perished… Our dynasty survived because of Hanuman."

People got very angry at Rama since he had started thinking about the battle.

"It would be a great thing if people protect their own dynasties… What is great if others protect it?"

"Well said! The greatness of the dynasty of these people sees to survive with the help of others!"

"With the help of those who do not belong to their caste and gotra."

Expressing his sorrow, Rama said, "To a man who did so much help…. what help can I give in return? With this worry, I don't have the joy that I have heard about the welfare of Sita…." Rama bent his head.

"Nay! I don't want anything, Ramayya!' Hanuman felt overwhelmed.

"My heart does not feel satisfied if I don't make Hanuman happy. Now I will give him a gift!" said Rama serenely with a smile.

Pundits, rural folk — every body are looking with wonder, anxiety and curiosity.

"What will he give?"

"I don't know…May be he has some money in the cave…."

"There are Sita's ornaments, you know… he will give them away."

People behind pushed forward in groups — not being sure whether they would clearly see the gift, which Rama was going to give Hanuman.

All those who were sleeping arose with loud noises — as their legs and hands were *pressed down like sauce*.

Lakshmana alone knew the gift, which Rama was going to give Hanuman. He had got that gift when he had built the cottage in Panchavati.

Rama rose up with a smile and looked at Hanuman.

Hanuman was startled and rose involuntarily *without being aware of why he was getting up*.

Rama put his hands around Hanuman, embraced him once, removed his hands quickly and stood aside. "Hanuman! If I embrace you, it is like giving you every thing, isn't it?" Rama looked at him *serenely*.

Hanuman was still startled. First, he had not understood whether the presentation of the gift was over or not. Smiling disappointingly and looking at the stream, he puffed out his cheeks.

"Is there every thing in an embrace?" the logicians were lost in thought.

"If it were an embrace of a man and a woman…." Sex pundits were disappointed greatly.

People rose to go and dusted their turbans.

"Enough of this joy! Get up! Let us go home. He has given a very great gift….a gift that didn't cost a penny!"

"All right. What can he give….*dust*!"

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[Translation: **B. R. Bapuji**]

There is no Link between the 10th Story and the 11th Story. Now, the 11th Story begins at once.

➔ It means, this exploitative principle has fulfilled its function.

Rama talked only about the service of the servants but he did not talk any thing about the remuneration that masters ought to give to their servants. There are no distinctions like best, mediocre and base among masters. Masters are always the best. All of them belong to the first category.

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Story-11

How Great I am! How Many Hardships I Face!

Lowering his head, Rama was wailing. People were descending from the hill in groups. Those who were feeling uncomfortable either to sit or to leave moved farther back from where they had sat.

"Shall we also leave?"

"How can we leave when elders are not moving? Rama is still…."

Rama's mind was confused. He thought, somehow time has passed so far. Now, I have o wage a battle. I have never faced a situation when I had to wage such a big battle since I was born. It has been already delayed. If I wait for some more time, I will not get Sita back. I must wage a battle for my fame, reputation and honour of my dynasty if not for Sita.

To conquer Lanka is *not as easy as uttering few words*. Lanka is like a gem on the head of a great serpent which is somewhere in the middle of the sea… To capture it….

Wailing and raising his head occasionally, Rama looked at Sugriva as if asking him, 'Why don't you console me?'

Leaning on to the shoulders of his brother devotedly, Lakshmana consoled him every now and then, "Brother! Don't worry. It will not take much longer. You will see my sister-in-law soon. Don't grieve."

"Ramayya! Don't worry. Be brave," Sugriva also consoled Rama with respect. "All these days you were worried, unaware of Sita's whereabouts. Now why should you worry? Hanuman has found out every thing. Think that you have got your wife back. You should be happy not……"

"Sugriva! What is there if not grief, if I think about things to be done in future?" Rama blew his nose near his left thigh and wiped his nose with *dhoti*, the lower garment. If I think of that great sea, I feel so much sorrow as I feel joy to have heard of the well being of my dutiful wife. Sugriva! Do you think this whole Vanara army can reach the other shore?"[334] As grief surrounded him, Rama lowered his head and began to weep.

"Alas! What if however great I may be? How many hardships I face! I have never committed any sin. I have not violated any justice. What if I have done many good deeds?.... I have lost the kingdom…. Lost my

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334. Yuddha kanda, sarga 1, slokas 17 to 20:

After he gave the gift of embrace to Hanuman, Rama sat again and *sank in sorrow*. The whole orrow of Rama was, 'how can we cross the sea?' See what he says to Sugriva and Hanuman. Locating Sita is very good. My heart — which felt very happy to know of her well being — is orry because I think it is very difficult to cross the sea…. How can Vanaras — who stay in roups — reach the shore on the other side?.... You have conveyed the news about Sita to me. Now, what should Vanaras do to cross the sea?" — Sri Rama, the annihilator of the enemies filled with sorrow and began to think about a way to cross the sea.

Sri Rama was overcome by fear about how to cross the sea. It was not simply feeling sorry for while. His sorrow continued later also until Sugriva felt irritated and scolded him in many ways. We don't know how it appeared reasonable for the poet to show that a great warrior was so rightened. There is inconsistency everywhere!

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father.... Lost my wif….." Rama stopped suddenly.

Frowning a little bit, Sugriva said, "Ramayya! Why do you always dig out the past? What is the use in feeling sad about what has already happened? You have to think about the future. You have read all scriptures. Who else knows more than you about when and what should be done in the right way? You are a wise man. A very good man. A very powerful man. A very….. such a great man. Will it look proper if you feel sad like a foolish man? Has any one seen such a valorous man like you? Then… you… with one arrow… broke all the Maddi trees. The hills are still echoing that sound". He turned towards Nila and asked with enthusiasm, "What do you say?"

Nila had just got up a little while ago. His sleepy mood slowly diminished. A while ago some people — who had pushed forward to see Rama's gift — fell on Nila and he woke up irritably. He had been yawning since he 'woke' up.

Again, a big yawn was about to start but it *slid into his stomach with fear* as the king looked at Nila. Nila startled and shut his mouth.

In his enthusiasm to console Sri Rama, Sugriva ignored Nila's yawning. "Breaking these *Maddi* trees… how great it is!.... What do you say." He insisted on Nila answering.

Remembering that loud sound which had spoiled his pleasant sleep at that time, Nila praised Rama, nodding his head. "Yes, your Excellency! Nowhere have I seen a hero who made such a noise."

Turning towards Rama and adjusting the ornaments round his neck, Sugriva smiled. "Why do you always feel discouraged? If you feel discouraged like this you will lose enthusiasm. If you lose enthusiasm, you will feel sad. If you feel sad…."

Since he had become the king, Sugriva had been trying to use big words and preach *serenely*. "Man should have courage. If he loses courage, his task will be spoiled. If the task is spoiled, every thing will be ruined. If every thing is ruined….." he paused, frowning.

Sugriva was lost in thought. What is this? The matter began with grief, from grief to discouragement, from discouragement to total ruin! Will it stop there? If it won't stop… what will happen, then?... What is this? Why am I thinking? Am I *ministers*? What follows total ruin?

He turned quickly towards Nila and leant saying, "Think about it…quick…All the while I have thought about it, do you know?"

"Alas! What a terrible thing has happened, Your Excellency!" Nila stifled his yawn and felt sorry.

"All right. Think quickly."

"Yes, sir! Command me what to think?"

"What? Do I need to tell you about it? Then what is the use of having ministers for a king?"

"Yes, sir! Do you want me to think when we will go back home?"

"Nay! Not that. So you won't know unless I tell you! Think what follows total ruin?.... Quickly…."

"Yes sir!.... Yes Sir!... I am thinking about it. I have already started to…."

Sugriva looked at Rama with enthusiasm. Rama was still weeping. Sugriva was worried and turning towards Nila, he asked angrily, "What? Have you finished?"

Nila, in order to think, rotated his head like a top: above, below and on all sides."

"Your Excellency! It seems it is not going to finish. If you show mercy and …."

"What the hell are you saying?"

"If you give me a year's time…."

"What? Time? One year? What a wonder? Why haven't you asked for ten years time? Don't you have any sense?"

"Yes, sir!"

"How were you born as a minister?"

"Yes, sir!"

King Sugriva's anger diminishes if others bow humbly.

Sugriva's anger abated and he said, "…. So you want me to give you time? I was curious to know quickly what happens after total ruin. All right. Take time as you please. Is one year enough? Or do you want one more year?.... Will you be able to find out by then?"

"I think so, your Excellency! If total ruin happens by then....we will surely know about it."

"Oh, I see!"

"Your Excellency! We can't understand certain things. We know them only when they happen. We will know what happens after total ruin only when total ruin takes place."

"Yes, yes! Well said. It will be nice if it happens quickly. Then we will know quickly what happens after, won't we?"

"Your Excellency! Do you want me to give you an idea?"

"Hell with you. Wasn't I asking the same of you?"

"Rama is a great wise man, isn't he? Why don't you ask him to tell you what follows total ruin? We will come to know instantly."

"Ah! I see! Yeah.... I too know that", the king turned away his head.

Confiding to Hanuman, Rama was wailing. "..... I can't forget, you see! The help you have given me is not small! But what is the use? Everything has *turned into moon light in the forest*. It is like knowledge given to an illiterate. Do you think that all these hardships will finish and I can get back my dutiful wife? In this birth.... again my wife...."

Unable to see the grief of his brother, Lakshmana's eyes filled up with tears. The cloth on his shoulder was wet and had turned a limp.

Changing his position and scratching the thigh, Sugriva said, "Ramayya! Though you are wailing out of love for your wife, will you spare that wicked man *without killing him*? You are a great warrior. Where can he hide escaping from your arrows?.... Impossible! You will surely defeat Ravana in the battle." Sugriva looked at Rama with a smiling face.

Rama looked downcast as if saying, "What! Do you mean that I am going to fight alone?" This man had promised that it is his responsibility to kill Ravana and get back Sita! He cleverly made me kill his brother and has happily sat on the throne. So, how will he remember the promise? Perhaps he may drop out at the end. Why doesn't he decide on crossing the sea? He kept quiet as if he was not concerned. Shall I ask him?

Rama gave up his serenity to some extent occasionally since the people around him were Vanaras.

"Sugriva! If we want to kill Ravana, we have to cross the sea, don't we? What do you think about how to cross the sea?" Rama said somewhat serenely.

Waving his hands in quick response, Sugriva said, "That I do not know. You have to take care of the whole thing. You know every thing. I don't know how you will enable us to cross. I can't say anything. If you enable us to cross the sea and if my army reaches Lanka, then you can think that Ravana is dead. We can't do anything if we can't cross the sea. Not only we. Even gods cannot do anything. Even if it is virtually Devendra, what can he do to any one who is on the other side of the sea? Is there any way?" Sugriva turned his head to both the sides and as soon as he saw Nala, he asked him at once, "What do you say?"

Feeling excited as the king had spoken to him after a long while, Nala praised him, "Yes, your Excellency! Even Devendra cannot deny what you have said. Even he will be obliged to accept it. You are a great wise man."

Rama looked at Lakshmana with a side-glance and frowned as if saying, "Have you heard Nala's stupid words? Who is a great wise man — me or Sugriva?"

Unable to grasp the meaning of the side-glance, Lakshmana showered consoling looks, "Don't worry brother! You will surely be able to see my sister-in-law."

Still under the excitement, Nala said to Sugriva, "It is not a great thing for Ravana to sit on the other side of the sea. If he has guts, let him come this side! Then see how I fight the battle! He is dead if he steps this side of the sea!"

Somebody from among the people shouted, "He is in his own kingdom! If you have guts why don't you go to the other side?"

Nala did not utter a single word.

Again, the 'problem of the sea' raised its head as frightening as a sea, as serious as a sea and as gigantic as a sea.

Again, grief in Rama rose like a sea.

Alas! If I don't cross the sea… If I don't kill Ravana….If I don't conquer Lanka… If I do not get back Sita…. well, should I get back Sita?.... woman whose chastity is spoiled…. her chastity spoiled?... Will this doubt not leave me?.... Ravana desiring Sita… Sita's refusal…. Hanuman told every thing that he saw, didn't he? What if he had told?.... Did anything else not happen? Had Sita been defiled?... Then why all these attempts for a battle?.... Why do I have this question? A battle must take place. Ravana is the enemy of my race. There is no question of sparing the enemy. Who will win and who will lose!.... Hanuman was saying that it appeared in Trijata's dream that I had won the battle. It may happen so! Otherwise, why should a Rakshasa-woman dream about my victory?

It seems Ravana has opposition… tomorrow, Vibhishana himself may become an opponent of his brother during the battle. What is his strength in the kingdom?…. What are his efforts?…. Will he cooperate or not with me even if he is opposed to his brother? Unless we cross the sea, information about him…. Alas! What is the use of these thoughts without crossing the sea?

Again the terrific sea! The sea is frightening with tidal waves as high as the sky!

Rama heard… occasionally… words of consolation from Sugriva, Lakshmana, Hanuman and many more people….

They advised him not to feel sad.

They asked him to be happy. Rama didn't desire happiness.

He invited grief.

He shed many tears, that Rishyamuka would sink in them and that those tears would turn into a sea there.

Sugriva was vexed to watch Rama still grieving despite a lot of consolation. He tried to reprimand him in a friendly manner. "You have wailed for a long while. It is enough, Ramayya! Stop wailing. A king must have some anger, you see! Who will be afraid of a man who is not angry?[335] Every one will slight a fellow who is mild.

You should pounce upon the enemy with anger…." Saying so, Sugriva turned his head to both the sides and pounced upon Nila with anger as he saw him. "Why did you sleep a while ago?"

Nila was startled, hung his head, lowered his shoulders and bowed to the ground.

"What? Again sleeping?"

"Nay, I swear. What is this sleep? Just like that….*a nap like that of a hen*…."

"Do you know what I will do if you sleep next time? Death…."

"Don't say it, don't say it. You do as you wish"

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335. Yuddha kanda, sarga 2, All slokas:

See what Rama thinks about crossing the sea and how Sugriva consoles him. "To Rama who was extremely pathetic out of grief, Sugriva said words of consolation as follows."

"Warrior! Why do you grieve like a stupid, ordinary man? Don't' do this… I don't understand the reason for your grief since we know pretty well about Sita and the location of the enemy…. You are the best among wise men…. You are a pundit who knows all the scriptures…. You are fit to conquer the enemies with ministers like me (*Sugriva is subordinating himself to Rama.*) Give up the grief-stricken mentality that destroys all the tasks." Thus, he consoled him coolly. But, as Rama was still grieving, Sugriva got wild. He said, "Rama! What ever you have grieved so far is enough. Stop grieving. (*Stop it, shut up!*) Get angry. Kshatriyas who are action less are unfortunate. Every body is afraid of a man who has anger. Somehow, we have to cross the sea", said Sugriva.

'Kshatriyas, who sit crying without doing any thing are useless. Why do you cry like a stupid person? Enough. Stop crying!' — The poet is totally ignorant how wrong it is to make Sugriva utter such words about Rama. As he wants to preach sermons every now and then, he makes someone — whoever is available in a given scene — to utter sermons!

This is ignorance regarding the portrayal of a character. ★

Sugriva cooled down, turned towards Rama and said, adjusting the jewels pricking his neck, “One should put on anger.” And Sugriva put on smiles.

Rama also got angry at Sugriva. Seeing Sugriva adjusting those jewels now and then.... moreover since he had asked Rama to think about crossing the sea....

Rama *was feeling angry — thinking and feeling angry*. In his angry thought, he had a beautiful idea. Putting aside even that minimum serenity, he wailed, “Alas! Sugriva! How can we cross the sea?”

Annoyance enveloped Sugriva. Throwing away all the royal dignity and throwing away the little or no handsomeness of his face, Sugriva frowned and said angrily. “Somehow or the other we have to cross it. Is it avoidable? You have all my men, don’t you? They will do something or the other and do the job. They will put some embankment.”[336]

Ignoring Sugriva’s anger and not feeling hurt, Rama looked scared. “Building a bridge over the sea! Is it possible?”

All people began to whisper in wonder.

Lakshmana’s *face put on a blank face*. His common sense had already started ridiculing him. “Your brother says he would fell the sky with one arrow. He says he would dry up the seas. He says he will change the movements of the sun and the moon. He has those arrows, doesn’t he? Why is your brother so upset?” It frowned.

His brother’s attitude was annoying Lakshmana too. Why should he talk so helplessly in the presence of so many people? Is Sugriva more valorous than he?

“People are always like that. They are fools!”

“If people are fools, what about your brother’s knowledge?”

“Tut! Stop!”

“You are also a younger brother of that elder brother, aren’t you?”

Lakshmana turned his face towards Sugriva.

Sugriva was also worried. Though he had just spoken out somehow. ‘But... building a bridge over the sea... reaching Lanka... Battle with Ravana.... Will all this happen?’

He looked around with hesitation and fear.

Hundreds of commanders were around him.

They were so capable of controlling the armies, fighting big battles and accomplishing great tasks. ‘While I have many capable men under me.....’

Adjusting his jewels and looking at Rama proudly Sugriva said, “Why is it not possible? Don’t we have commanders of the Vanara army?” He sparkled a smile.

All the army commanders staggered and looked at each other’s face.

‘Building a bridge over the sea? Is it possible for us? Why has the king assigned this job to us? Will he ask us to build it?’ — They looked in all directions worriedly.

People! People all around!

Crowds of people. Crowds of people!

On trees, on hills, on mounds. In all the houses... villages.... throughout the kingdom.

Their courage... their strength and capabilities... their innocence.... their sacrifice for kings... their martyrdom... when there are many such people....

The fear of the commanders abated. They looked at the king with smiling faces.

The king turned to another side.

The commanders who were at that side too showed their smiling faces.

The fear of the king fully abated. He looked at Rama with a smile. “All my ministers and commanders are very enthusiastic. They will

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336. Yuddha kanda, sarga 2, slokas 9 to 12: Finally, Sugriva himself gives the idea of how to cross the sea. It had not occurred to Rama. “Sri Rama! Think about building a bridge over the sea and conquer the city of Ravana, the king of Rakshasas. Without building a bridge on the sea, it is not possible even for Indra to destroy Lanka. Realise that this entire Vanara army can cross the sea and conquer the enemy only when we build a bridge over the sea.” — Thus, it was Sugriva who gave the idea of building a bridge over the sea.

★

do whatever you want them to do. If you want, they will root out Lanka and get it here. There is no doubt about it. After all, how big is Ravana?... It is only a matter of crossing the sea. If we crossed it, he is dead! You will watch, how my men fight the battle![337]

Why should I say so much. You will know every thing. We will definitely win. Omens are also good." He raised his head and examined the surroundings, adjusting the jewels around his neck... "Ah...yes... the wind is good... Trees are good.... Look there! That bird is flying towards that side.... It is a good omen if it flies so... The sky is also good... Every thing is fine." He saw serenely as though he too could talk about good omens.

On seeing Sugriva's courage, Rama too got enormous courage.

He got confidence that after reaching the seashore all this Vanara army will do something or the other.

Suddenly a doubt rose in Rama that he might have behaved very cowardly in the presence of Vanaras concerning the crossing of the sea. That doubt rapidly rose up *as high as a palm tree*. Rama felt slighted and repented within himself. He regained *serenity* as before and saw Hanuman, nodding his head. "All that your king said is excellent. Is crossing the sea a great task? I *do not lack the power* to make all of you cross the sea either by drying up all the water, building a bridge or by any other means using my power of penance.... I have simply asked if you people might suggest other things....."[338]

Hanuman is surprised.

Sugriva too is surprised.

But they listened for the sake of courtesy. They nodded their heads.

"Then why has he wailed all this while?" people at a distance were debating unhesitantly.

"Oh! The sun is burning the head. This man does not spare us, if we want to leave!"

"Has he held you tightly? You don't come if I ask you. Are all those people not leaving?"

"Then, let's us go"

Some people rose up to leave.

Rama nodded his head *serenely*. He asked Hanuman, "About crossing the sea... let it be like that... Tell me all the details of the city of

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337. Yuddha kanda, sarga 2, slokas 7 & 8: On whom did Sugriva lay his hopes of building a bridge? On his commanders. That is, on those who lead the armies. See what Sugriva says to Rama. "Rama! All these Vanara commanders are enthusiastic to do good for you.... By the blossoming of their faces it is clear that these Vanara commanders have enthusiasm. *(It is clear from their faces that they are in good spirits!)* In this respect, my assessment is sound."

Rama was dependent on Sugriva.

Sugriva was dependent on his commanders.

The commanders on the armies.

That is on ordinary people!

This is the secret of the heroic deeds of great kings.

Heroism is always not of the rulers but of the people! ★

338. Yuddha kanda, sarga 3, slokas 2 & 3:

Rama wailed for a while as to how to cross the sea. Sugriva reprimanded him in a friendly manner. He consoled him. Gave him an idea. After all this, look at what Rama says, "I have the power to cross the sea either by the impact of my penance, or building a bridge or drying up the sea and by various means. How many fortifications — of land, water and hill are there — in Lanka? I want to know them as if I have seen them myself."

Fearing about some thing in the beginning and saying (*after another person gave him an idea*), "All right! I know about it. I can do that job some how or the other... Tell me other things" — is this a feature of honesty? Is this kind of character and behaviour an ideal to be cherished?★

Lanka. How much army is there in Lanka? What sort of strength and capabilities they have? How many weapons do they have? What sort of defence does the city have? Tell me everything in detail."

Among those who rose up to leave, some people sat again with curiosity.

Recalling all the things that he had seen, Hanuman began to narrate with excitement. "I will tell you every thing Ramayya! I will *narrate it like stringing beads in order as a garland.* The defence arrangements around Lanka are not small, you see! Oh! Ravana is very concerned about it. I should speak about things in black and white. Like you, he too does not have bad habits like gambling and the like. He examines carefully all the four types of armed forces. If there is a battle, he goes into action personally."[339]

"It is alright!...About the army in Lanka...."

"Ah, yes! I'll tell you about it. I'll tell you every thing about it. The entire city of Lanka is on the Trikuta mountain. They have carved around the mountain smoothly. None can climb it. Even gods cannot climb it."

"Then how could you climb?" Sugriva looked at Hanuman in amazement.

"Some how, I managed to climb it" said Hanuman and looked as if he were saying, "Can't I climb even if gods cannot?" Hanuman resumed his narration. "There is a big wall around Lanka. What should I tell about its beauty? Oh! One has to see it oneself. It is not enough if I talk about it. Do you think it is built with stones or earth? Nay! They have built it with lumps of gold. They have studded that gold with pearls, gems, diamonds, precious stones and some more glittering things... I don't know all those names, you see!"

Rama was unable to believe it.

Sugriva saw as if he could not believe it.

"One has to keep gold in a safe place, does any one stud it into the wall? Will somebody not steal it?" People were surprised.

"May be there are no thieves in that country!"

"Stop it! Won't there be thieves if there is gold all along the wall? May be they keep guards around it"

"Why the hell will they keep gold all around the wall and then why keep guards? It seems Ravana is crazy"

Hanuman is still describing that wall. He says *two eyes are not enough to see* it. He says except in heaven such walls are not seen elsewhere. As they hear those descriptions, every body feels, "What is the use of this birth if we can't see that wall?" They are tempted to go to Lanka to see that wall if not for Sita's sake.[340]

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[339] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 3, sloka 20:** Hanuman narrated Ravana's qualities. "Rama! Ravana is without vices like gambling. (*The Telugu translators have translated the poet's original word 'prakritim' as 'character without vices'*), he is always cautious of every thing, he reviews daily four types of armed forces and is interested in fighting a battle himself." ★

[340] Building walls and houses with gold, studding them with diamonds and precious stones — we have to understand these things as things presented in mythical form. In a story where Ravana is a Rakshasa with ten heads and Hanuman is a monkey with a tail, this myth of golden walls fits. But, in '*The Poisonous Tree*' we are treating Rama and Hanuman as human beings. In such a situation, the description of golden walls does not fit. But the reason for my inclusion of those descriptions in these stories is to say how ridiculous it is to believe the myths verbatim. Some people believe every myth and description found in the epics and *puranas*. Such people believe that there were golden walls in Lanka.

From the point of view of reality, we have to understand this golden wall as a stonewall. Hanuman saw the enemies' area. Surrounding that area there is a big wall. He tells us about it with amazement. We have to understand golden walls only in this manner.

Hanuman said that the wall around Lanka was studded with gems and diamonds — perhaps the people in that village might have pasted cow dung on the walls to use as a fuel cake after it dried. ★

Depicting the fame of that wall, he finally concluded, "Nobody can climb on it. Even Hari, Brahma et cetera cannot climb it."

"Then how did you climb?"

"Of course, I could climb it somehow." He looked as if to say, "Can't I climb it if Hari and Brahma couldn't?"

"All people will climb it like you. ......Carry on. Tell us about the wall!"

"Yes, I am telling you about it. Don't hurry me. The wall has four gates on all the four sides. One of the gates is the biggest of all. The doors of those gates have very big iron bolts... Oh! How beautifully they have made those bolts!"

"The entire gold is used for walls. So, what more gold remains for the door, except iron.?"

"Besides those gates there are big porches with huge pillars where guards sit. Do you think there is an element of earth in them? Nay! Every thing is gold!"

"Oh! Did gold still remain?"

"Is he telling the truth?"

"I don't know. Let him say. Any way we will see it when we go there?"

Hanuman feels irritated as people do not listen to him properly. "Look! What is that talking? Do you know that there are machines that can throw stones of a hill size near those gates?"

Rama asked with amazement, "Machines that throw stones?"

"Not only stones, there are machines that throw arrows as well. Humans need not throw them. Machines themselves will throw them." Hanuman is describing the greatness of machines with excitement.

All the descriptions of Hanuman seemed to be discouraging Rama. If lifeless machines throw arrows, then what is his speciality ? What is his valour?"

"....Near those gates, there are clubs which are of a hill size. Each of the clubs will kill a hundred people and make them into a paste. Oh, if it comes and falls on us....?"

Sugriva raised his head with fear. "Where did they get all those ideas?" **341**

Every thing was confusing for Rama — much before he crossed the wall surrounding Lanka.

"How can we fight battles with people who have such machines", Sugriva said to the others near him, with a smiling face.

People were very curious. They had never heard about machines.

"Nice country. We must certainly see it."

"Ah! You will see it. You will see it well if a boulder comes and falls on your head."

Hanuman depicted as if he were guarding those gates. "Do you know it is not possible for any one to pass through the gates and enter Lanka? At the gate on the eastern side, ten thousand soldiers guard it with swords and spears. On the South side a lakh soldiers...."

"Oh! I see! What about on the west side?"

"Wait, I am telling you about it. Why don't you *let the words fall from my mouth*? Ten lakhs of people! In the north, still more. Ten thousand

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341. Yuddha kanda, sarga 3, sloka 24: Trenches, canons (the poet used the word *satagni*) and various kinds of machines *(yantrani)* are protecting.

Were there different kinds of war machines at the time when *Ramayana* was composed? Very primitive kind of weapons might have been there. On seeing them, the poet might have imagined bigger weapons.

Just as *Pushpak* airplane is a creation of the mere imagination, all these machines were also created in the imagination.

Believing verbatim these cannon, golden walls, platforms studded with precious stones, Pushpak planes and all these myths, admirers of Lanka argue that the 'civilization of Lanka was greater than that of Kosala'. But at the beginning of Ramayana, while describing Dasaratha's kingdom, the poet depicted as if all these 'machines' were present in Kosala kingdom also. ★

crores! In the centre of Lanka, another crore soldiers."[342]

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[342] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 3, slokas 25 to 29:**

"10 thousand soldiers at the Eastern gate.
One lakh.................at the Southern gate.
Ten lakhs................at the western gate.
Ten thousand crores....at the Northern gate.
One crore.............. in the centre.

What are these calculations?

Ten thousand soldiers at the eastern gate.

Ten thousand crores soldiers at the northern gate.

Is the enemy menace more at the northern gate compared to the eastern gate?... There is no such thing in the story.... Mountain in the midst of the sea. A city on that mountain. When the sea is all around, all sides are the same. Enemy menace is not more on any one particular side. Then why such a difference in the number of soldiers who guard at the gates?

It is because, while the poet composes, he needs poems that are in accordance with the metre. Except on the myth, metre and poetry, the poet does not concentrate on reality.

See the following words that indicate the number of soldiers that guard Lanka.

Ayutam = 10 thousands.
Niyutam = Lakh.
Prayutam = 10 Lakhs.
Koti = Crore.
Sagrakoti = One full crore.
Arbudam = Thousand crores.
Nyarbudam = Ten thousand crores.

We find these words in those slokas. The poet started with the Eastern gate. There it is 'ayutam'. At the next gate is 'niyutam'. Next 'prayutam'.

1. Ayutam rakshasaa matra *puurva* dwaaram samasritam.
2. Niyutam rakshasaa matra *dakshina* dwaaramaasritam.
3. Prayutam rakshasaa matra *paccima* dwaramaasritam.
4. Nyarbudam rakshasaa matra *uttara* dwaara maasritam.

Thus, the soldiers are guarding to suit the poetry. If it does not affect the metre, we can shift a word from one gate to another.

To indicate numbers, the poet has used many words other than these words at many more places.

We can see their details in **sarga 28, slokas 34 to 39**.

One lakh crores = *Shankham.*
One lakh Shankhams = *Mahashankham.*
One lakh Mahashankhams = *Brindam.*

Thus, if we increase every word a lakh times and understand them, then they will be as follows: *Shankham, Mahashankham, Brindam, Mahabrindam, Padmam, Mahapadmam, Kharvam, Mahakharvam, Smudram, Ogham, Mahaogham.*

Vanara army is of many Mahaoghas, many Oghas, many Samudras, many Padmas, many......! This is how the poet describes.

Whenever we come across such descriptions and calculations, we have to assume that ➔

"How did you count them?"

"Is it necessary to count? Can't we know if we estimate them? .....Who can pass through those gates, escaping so many soldiers and machines?"

"You passed through, didn't you?"

"Of course, I passed through! But....even gods...."

Discouragement pulls Rama down. "All right! Next?"

"What is next? How to first move from there?" A gentleman changed his position and placed his legs on each other.

"Do we remain there itself without moving? If so, why should we start at all? Somehow, we should cross the sea!" Hanuman began again.

"Somehow, we should climb that mountain. Somehow.... we have to jump that wall....."

"All right! All right!" said Sugriva irritably.

Sugriva was curious to know more about Lanka quickly.

"Aren't I telling things slowly?" Hanuman too said irritably with an enthusiasm to describe things leisurely. "Well... after passing through those gates... now hear about the trench. In that trench, there is water which is so cool that it exhausts your nerves all at once."

"Did you touch it?"

"Touch it? Believe me, I was dead due to the rapidly blowing cold wind."

"All right, next?"

"Do you think it is over? In that trench, raft-sized...."

"Fish?"

"What? Have you thought of making fish curry? Crocodiles!... And some more!...... Look at that black stone under Mainda's buttocks.... In fact, that is also small.... there are tortoise of such size....."

"Then how do they move around there?"

"They keep wooden planks near the gates. They move freely over them."

"What is the problem? There will be wooden planks and we too can move like them."

"Nay, it is not possible. If they come to know that enemies are intruding, they will remove all those planks. There are machines that remove those planks."

"Oh, my goodness! What a great idea!" Sugriva saw Rama with a smiling face.

The tricks, knack and precautions of the people of Lanka are fascinating even to Rama. 'Yes. One should rule a country like that!', he thought.

"Then how can we cross those trenches?"

"We have to cross them somehow or the other"

None is able to understand how this tactic of 'some how or the other' can be applied!

Hanuman went ahead with his narration.

"There is no place in Lanka even to put your foot down. It is full of the army. So many horses! So many chariots! So many elephants! So many.....! So many.....!"

"Sita! Can't I see you, my love!" Rama fainted at once with the help of his love.

"Can any one conquer Lanka?"

Debates went on among people gathered there.

"If the machines were not there....."

"Even if there were no machines.... That wall.....?"

"Why do you go-up to the wall? First cross the sea."

"In fact, I don't have any belief in what Hanuman says. See how he reported about those soldiers? He says, there are thousand men at one place and ten thousand crores at another place. Does he at all know counting or numbers? The kid of my daughter talks in the same manner. Whatever his mother cooks, he asks, 'give me ninety and eleven or seventy hundreds.' Such are Hanuman's numbers. Any way, we should not believe him unless we see them", a gentleman preached all those around him.

People over there listened with smiling

➔ they are the words used for the sake of rhyme in poetry. We should not believe such things as facts. The point more important point than this is that Rama's strength is dependent on the Vanara army and Ravana's strength on the Rakshasa-army. Their valour is dependent on the strength of the people. This is what we should note. ★

faces and open-mouthed.

Finishing all the descriptions of Lanka, Hanuman proceeded a little further. ".....However great they may be? Let there be any number of machines! Is a single warrior like me not enough to destroy them completely?.... Why do we need all this army? At the most, it is enough if Angada and I go there. We will get the entire Lanka and drop it at the feet of Ramayya."

"It is enough if they take Rama and drop him in Lanka. Then Lanka will be at the feet of Rama, isn't it?"

"Don't talk! Rama is getting up...."

On seeing the excitement of Hanuman, Rama slowly recovered and got up. 'Can't I do whatever Angada and Hanuman can do?' Rama got confidence that he can defy those clubs, machines, trenches and everything in Lanka. Nodding his head serenely, Rama angrily shouted, "What is Lanka?.... I will destroy it in a moment!" Rama rose up and sat down.

Sugriva looked at Rama as if thinking, "Is he still talking in his fainting fit?"

"This is not a lie! I am speaking the truth! You will see!" Rama looked at Sugriva straight away.[343]

Sugriva felt uncomfortable and said, "Oh, no! I do not doubt you!.... Will there be any untruth in your words?.... Don't I know your valour? Is it only Lanka? You can conquer the entire globe!"

Sugriva praised and looked at him with reverence.

"Well, Ramayya! It is better if we decide when to go for the battle", said Hanuman humbly.

"Why delay? Let us start right now", Rama saw serenely.

"Now? Right now?" There began a tumult among people.

Rama looked at all the elders. "The sun is in the *middle of the sky*. This is an auspicious hour. We will be victorious if we start now. Today, the star is *Uttara Falguni*. Today is an auspicious day. Tomorrow it is *Hasta*. Hasta is not auspicious. We will get Sita alive if we start now itself. All the omens are very favourable. My right eye is trembling. It tells me victory is mine. Therefore, if we start at this auspicious hour, Ravana cannot take away Sita without letting me get Sita. We should start now itself....." laying all his hopes on the midday sun and birds flying towards south, Rama looked at Sugriva and hurried him, "Sugriva! Make all the valorous people start for the battle! Keep inefficient men here for the protection of Kishkindha! Quickly make arrangements to mobilize the army. All people must start before the auspicious hour passes."

People descended the hill in a hurry.

"I have been asking you for a long while to let us go home, did you heed? We have not yet returned from the Mahendra mountain. Again, should we go for the battle? We have not even seen people at home! If we start tomorrow morning, we can talk a little bit with all our people."

"Who knows that the danger befalls like this?"

"All right! It is good that we have got up at least now. Let's go quickly."

Commanders hurried. They shouted at the top of their voice. "None of you should go home. All of you come back! Call all people from the village! *You have to come back as if you are here*. Death penalty to those who do not turn up. It is the order of king Sugriva! Come back! Call every body!"

"Come on! Come on!" all the hills called out.

All those descending the hill halted. In moments, every thing was ready for the journey.

The entire Vanara army that was going for the battle assembled at one place.

All the commanders stood around Rama.

Rama ordered serenely. "Nila! You have to walk in front with some army. Gaj, Gavayu

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343. Yuddha kanda, sarga 4, sloka 2: Rama says he will destroy Lanka quickly. He says to Hanuman, "I will quickly destroy Lanka, which you say is terrible. I am telling you the truth."

He says he is speaking seriously. All right! Let us see, how quickly he will destroy it! ★

and Gavaksha too should be in the front of the army. Gandhamadhana at the eastern side and Rishabha at the southern side should protect the army. Jambavan, Sushena and Vegadarshi must protect the rear of the army.[344]

Nila! You should walk looking at the path carefully. You have to lead the army along the path where fruits, bulbs and water are available. Enemies hide themselves here and there in low-lying areas in order to attack our army suddenly. Our soldiers must always check if enemies are on the hills and trees. Enemies always try to harm us. They mix poison in the ponds. They destroy fruit trees. You have to proceed without allowing their attempts to harm us."

Wondering at Rama's cautions, Sugriva said, "Yes, Ramayya! You are a great wise man. You know every thing. You know all the rules of battle." He appreciated Rama and shouted at his commanders hurriedly, "You have heard what Ramayya said..... Follow what he said. Why delay? Start quickly.!"

All the commanders bowed before Rama and declared their obedience. "We will follow all your orders, Lord!"[345]

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The army is proceeding toward the South.

Moving like a flood, it is making a great noise like a sea. It is roaring like a cloud.

That great human crowd across the entire earth is like a field with a fully-grown crop.

Surrounded by soldiers who are great warriors, Sri Rama, Sugriva and Lakshmana, who are great warriors and who are a terror for the enemies are marching forward boldly and enthusiastically.

In the midst of forests, they cross big and small villages.

They ascend and descend hills.

They gather around ponds.

All along their path, they walk under many great trees: *Marri, Mamidi, Burugu, Ippa, Chandra, Vusirika, Asoka, Vepa, Neredu* and many more huge trees.

There are frightening bears, elephants, pigs and antelopes that were coming towards water ponds from the hills and rocks.

Whenever they saw an animal at a distance, they shouted at the top of their voice and chased them away.

They were imitating the chirping of birds. They drive them away by ridiculing them.

They lower the tree branches and break them.

Eat all the fruits and bulbs, which they found on their way. Drink honey.

Swimming in the lakes and plucking all the flowers.

Climbing up and down the rocks.

Plucking all the fragrant plants.

Stamping all the fragrant flowery bushes.

Breaking all the creepers spread all over the ground, they surround, cross and leap over

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344. Nila should walk this side. Jambavan should walk that side. Sushena that side, Vegadarshi this side. — This kind of assignment has nothing to do with the speciality of those characters. It is merely taking some important characters and arranging them prosodically to various sides. Just because Rama asked, we should not think that Nila was skilful or efficient. All are great warriors. All are heroes among great warriors. Whomsoever the poet remembered first will walk in the front. If the poetry, rhythm, or grammar does not permit them, they will walk behind. ★

345. Yuddha kanda, sarga 4, sloka 19 & 20: Since Vanaras in Valmiki's *Ramayana* are monkeys, Rama and Lakshmana sit on Vanaras instead of walking.

Rama says, "Just as Indra sits on Iravata, I will sit on Hanuman and make the army happy. Just as Kubera, the *Yaksha* king, sat on the elephant called Sarvabhowma, Lakshmana should sit on Angada."

He chose Hanuman. Perhaps he will carry him without dropping him down. He doesn't know how Angada carries, does he? That is why, he asked Lakshmana to sit on Angada. ★

the thorny bushes, *Gacha* bushes and *Mogali* bushes.

Whenever they forgot about the battle, their journey proceeded with great enthusiasm. But when they remembered it, great disappointment enveloped them.

Those who went in the front stopped at the rocks in crowds and narrated each other's pains and pleasures.

Somebody said, "Our dear cow has delivered. I have not even seen it. I wanted to eat *Junnu* (cheese)."

"What is great about the cow? It is delivery time for *my woman* (wife). It may be today or tomorrow. I came here leaving her behind. Do you think I can see her again? It will be only if I survive this battle, won't it?"

"Don't worry. Don't fill your eyes with tears... What can we do? Who knows about one's fate!"

"Do you think the battle will surely take place? Or will Rama and Ravana agree to a truce?"

"I don't have any hope. If that man does not release her, how is truce possible?"

"You are crazy. Do you think all this battle is meant for Sita alone?"

"This is very funny. Then what is it for?"

"Will they tell us all their politics? They tell us some superficial reason. The actual secret is something else,"

"You are crazy. What else can there be?"

"All right. It will be clear, who is fighting the battle for what purpose."

Shouts are heard from behind.

"Hey! Get up! Move on! You can't stop. Move on!

All those who sat rose and began to walk.

Rama would like to ask Hanuman when he is alone all things about Sita. Shouting, talking.... tumult all around.

While Hanuman walked beside him, Rama could not restrain himself from talking to Hanuman. "Hanuman! Your debt... never...."

"Oh, no! Don't say so.... Ramayya!"

"You told me about Sita's safety. It is nice.... After you left, that wicked man...."

"He is wicked but... Sita Devi is a great devoted wife, my lord!"

"Yes.... My *ardhaangi* (half body)....My dutiful wife....." Rama's eyes filled with tears.

Lakshmana — who had forgotten to serve to his brother as he was immersed in conversation with Angada until then — reached his brother hurriedly.

"Brother! You need not grieve any longer. Battle will surely take place. That wicked man will die. After conquering Lanka, you will return to Ayodhya along with your wife. Many good omens appear to herald your victory. The wind blows freely. All the directions are peaceful. The star of our dynasty, Visakha, is shining bright. The start of the Rakshasas is dark. It is very obvious that the ruin of Rakshasas is inevitable. Brother! You should feel happy, seeing all these omens." Consoling obediently, Lakshmana saluted him.

Seeing the Vanara warriors who were running like horses around him and deriving enthusiasm, Rama shouted serenely, "Yes, Lakshmana! The ruin of the Rakshasas is inevitable. I will kill Ravana with the rain of my arrows. I will completely destroy Lanka itself." After shouting for a while, he *sank into silence*.

"....That Vibhishana.... even if he cooperates a little... what is there which makes it impossible to capture Lanka?.... Going by what Hanuman said.... however much I thought.... it appears Vibhishana is a clever man. The troops crossed *Sahya* and *Malaya* mountains and reached *Mahendra* mountain.

The sea invited them with great enthusiasm from a distance.

★ ★

"Sugriva! We have reached the seashore! Now halt the troops. You have to search if there are enemies in the surroundings." Looking around, Rama sat flat under a tree and relaxed.

All the elders gathered round Rama.

The commanders shouted and asked the soldiers to halt wherever they were.

"Hey! Stop... Now halt! Don't push

forward! Sit wherever you are. Tell others who are behind you!" Commanders shouted.

The shouts of the commanders echoed throughout the troops. They flowed from one corner to another.

The troops halted on the seashore.

The sea rose up as if it was feeling happy on seeing human beings.

On seeing the sea, Rama's grief rose up. With melodious sound and the great noise of the waves, the sea laughed without stopping on seeing Rama.

Seeing the vast sea with a side-glance, Rama sighed, "Sugriva! Now, the time has come to cross the sea."

Looking at the sea strangely, Sugriva said, "Yes….it has come. Has any idea to cross it also come to you?" Sugriva looked at Rama again and said, "Then think about it!" He turned his face towards the sea.

The intensity of the waves in the sea of sorrow of Sri Rama started. He made me believe that Vanara warriors alone will build a dam after they reach the shore. What is this carelessness as if he is not concerned with anything? Now what is the way out to cross the sea? The earlier question itself haunted them again. What is the idea?

Lowering his head, Rama closed his eyes.

"Brother!.... Do not grieve... Have courage….."

"Lakshmana! As the time passes grief recedes, doesn't it? But it is increasing in me every moment."

"You are a great man brother! The rustic rules that apply to ordinary people do not apply to you. Be courageous….surely….you…."

"Alas! See this cool breeze! It has increased the heat of my romantic separation. Oh! *Vayudeva*, the god of wind! Touch my love and then touch me…. Alas!.... This cruel fellow…. This Manmadha…."

All those who were waiting to hear Rama's idea about crossing the sea looked at each other's face.

"How can he get this feeling of romantic separation, now, my god!"

"Why now or then? If one just eats and sits idle, he will get it at any time… Is Vayudeva female or male?"

"You are crazy! You may say female or whatever you like?"

"If he is a male, can he touch Sita Devi? Rama asked Vayudeva to touch Sita first and then touch him."

The other man, without paying attention, looked at Rama's heat of romantic separation with surprise.

"……. How have I lived all these days! Whenever I see the moon in the sky, I feel happy that I see Sita through the moon since Sita also sees the same moon….. Lakshmana! the fire of this romantic separation is burning me. I cannot bear this any longer. I will lie down in the sea. That flowery archer cannot do any thing to me… But all the water in the sea may evaporate due to the heat of my romantic separation!"

"It is nice! Then we can happily cross the sea", said Lakshmana's commonsense quickly.

Lakshmana startled and turned his head to the other side.

"What kind of a talk is this?"

"When your brother behaves so vulgar, can't the people around — however tribal they may be — understand what is good and what is bad?"

"Enough! Stop it! Don't think you know more than my brother does! He is feeling so sad because he is unable to forget his wife even for a moment….."

"You and your brother are made for each other! Any way, you always find fault with me." The commonsense felt slighted and disappeared with tears.

"It is better if Sri Rama lies down in the sea. The sea will dry up", some one said.

Lakshmana had not looked at that side.

People at the back hit those in the front on their shoulders and asked them, "What is happening in the front?"

"Lakshmana! When that wicked man was abducting her, my dutiful wife cried, "My husband! My husband!" The same cry is *piercing my heart*! It is echoing in my ears."[346]

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346. Yuddha kanda, sarga 5, sloka 7: "While Ravana was abducting, my love called, 'Oh, my husband!' That call is burning my body like poison," says Rama. This is not saying, 'Sita might ➔

Lakshmana turned pale. 'What is that call? When did he hear it? Is brother entering the state of madness?' "Brother-sir!....Be courag...."

"How could I live all these days! I might have lived because my wife too has been living on this earth!....."

The sea laughed uncontrollably. He *rubbed the sandal of foam against the waves.*

It seems it is this foam that the moon carries with him, smears it in all the directions with his rays, and makes them cool and white.

"Brother! Give up your grief.... Now, soon.... killing that wicked man... Get my sister-in-law....."

Lowering his head, Rama sighed. "Alas! Lakshmana! My grief is not because I am away from my dutiful wife. Nor because the enemy had stolen my wife.... I am wailing so much because all of Sita's *age and youth* is being wasted every moment."[347]

Lakshmana is shocked.

Sugriva looked at Rama in confusion and turned his view from the sea.

Hanuman puffed his cheeks out in surprise.

All the elders turned their faces towards those who stood beside them. They were closer to each other in order to whisper into each other.

Rama *sank in the romantic separation and floated in his dreams.*

".....I don't know when I will see Sita!.... When will I bring her face near my face and drink the nectar of her lips!... Embracing those breasts...."[348]

Lakshmana turned his face towards the sea.

With smiles, Sugriva moved towards Nila.

People at a distance pulled the shoulders and hit the abdomen of those who were in the front and caused them annoyance. "Is Rama thinking about crossing the sea?"

"Yeah! Thinking very well. Rama thought a lot about when he will embrace Sita Devi",

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➔ have called like that. Might have cried so.' Rama says it as if he himself had heard it. This madness may not diminish until they get an idea of how to build that bridge over the sea! ★

347. Yuddha kanda, sarga 5, sloka 5:

Now the reason for Rama's grief has changed. When he has the strength and capacity to rescue his wife, it doesn't look nice if he wails, "Shall I see Sita? Shall I get Sita?" So, the poet discovered another great reason. "I am not feeling sad because my love is away. I am not feeling sad because the enemy had stolen her. I am feeling sad because Sita's age is being wasted", says Rama. So, Rama's sorrow is that Sita's age is going waste without enjoying sex!

Well, what about the age of Lakshmana who was there having left his wife behind?

Let the age of his wife be like that! What about Lakshmana's wife? Why don't Lakshmana and his wife come to Rama's mind? ★

348. Yuddha kanda, sarga 5, slokas 12 to 14: While there is a task of crossing the sea and surrounded by Vanara army, see how leisurely this gentleman is enjoying the heat of sexual separation (*Viraha tapa*)! "When can I see Sita, who has large eyes! When can I lift Sita's face, which is like a lotus, and drink her lips, which are like the *Donda* fruit just as a patient drinks medicine? When will the breasts of Sita — which are strong like palm fruits, which are close to each other and which tremble gently when they touch me — get me?" This is poetry!

This is the occasion for the heat of sexual separation!

Description of Sita Devi's breasts amidst so many people! Well, this is the sex of Sri Rama! The poet does not have a thought whether what he is narrating is proper or not; appropriate to the context or not. In feudal poetry, the hero must always enjoy the heat of sexual separation. He must always describe breasts and thighs of women. It will be great poetry if they are constantly mentioned. Such holy poetry!

Notice another point. All this feeling of sexual separation is for Rama only. Sita does not have it. Nowhere does she talk of the 'feeling of sexual separation', sexual desire, Manmadha, his arrows etc. Sita had protected the honour of women! ★

people in the front are telling those who are at the back.

The people at the back told those who were still far at the back with shouts, "Rama is thinking about when he will embrace his wife. Tell this to those who are behind you."

"Why should this man have the vow of one wife? Is it an easy thing to live with only one wife? How much restraint one needs to have! Whereas this man cries if cool breeze blows a little. He makes a hullabaloo if birds chirp. He says he cannot bear, if trees shake…. He talks of Manmadha…. arrows…. A fellow like him who doesn't have any thing to do…. *neither work nor song*…. must have seven wives."

"Very well said! Wouldn't it be nice had he married three hundred or four hundred women like his father? There wouldn't have been a dearth of wives even if the enemies abducted any number of wives."[349]

"Well, is there any indication that we are going to cross the sea or not?"

"Even if we cross, it will be a battle, won't it? Let us stay alive here for a while….. we have not even seen the children at home. Don't know whether we are going to see their faces again!"

News arrived from the front. "Rama had fainted! Rama had fainted!"

Again at once new news arrived, chasing the old news. "He has got up…He has got up."

All people were engrossed in gossipping.

Only hanuman sat closer to Rama and fanning him.

Rama sighed. "…… I have never harassed any one. I have never deviated from the principles of scriptures. Are hardships unavoidable even to a very good man?..... *Lad*, Hanuman.... Is Sita frail like a skeleton?

Hanuman was unable to ascertain what words of his caused pain and what had caused pleasure to Rama.

"Day and night….. remembering you…. with out sleep and food….."

"That wicked man…. do you think he did not harass her?'

"Why sinful words….. When I saw……"

"When you did not see, my lad?"

"Nay…. such vileness….."

"How do you know it, my lad?....."

"Sita Devi is a great……"

"Yes! Yes! My lad! That is why, I…. "My dutiful wife…..!"

"Brother! The sun is setting. Evening prayer towards west, Lakshmana reminded him with humility.

On seeing Lakshmana, Rama felt, "How fortunate he is!" He kept his wife in the harem luckily. What a protection for women in harems…. *even a male fly*….."

If Urmila too had come….? Whom would Ravana have abducted?

That wicked fellow has enmity with me only. Why does he…. Urmila?.... Sita….. why not both? He would have abducted both of them. It is great if he enjoys pleasures with many women of other men……

Pleasures….. with Sita…. Oh! Did she listen to me when I asked her not to come?

"Brother! Evening pray………"

Rama's sighing like *fire in the sea*. "Yes, my lad! We cannot avoid traditional duties…. Alas! Sita! My love! You…..", he got up.

As it was becoming dark, the noise of the sea was increasing.

As the noise of the sea increased, Rama's fear also increased.

Afraid of Rama's fear about crossing the sea, *the ideas are unable to lift up their heads.*

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[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

There is no Link between the 11th Story and the 12th Story.
Now, the 12th Story begins at once.

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349. It seems he was frightened for he practised the vow of one wife in the birth of Rama and hence kept so many thousands of wives in the birth of Krishna.

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Story-12

The Third Thief (Vibhishana)

The news that Rama had started off with the Vanara armies to wage battle against the Lanka kingdom was agitating the supreme head of Lanka.

Though the king sat *serene*ly on the throne, though he was twirling his moustache several times a moment, the fear in his looks and restlessness on his face were clear to all those sat in the assembly.

In that assembly which the king had urgently convened to chalk out the strategy for the battle, there were important ministers, warriors, commanders, advisors, pundits and elders.

Prahasta, Mahaparshva, Surya Satru, Agni Ketu, Rashmiketu, Indrajit, Dhumraksha and Virupaksha and many others were present.

Ravana's brothers — Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana — were also present.

Decorated themselves with expensive ornaments, all of them sat in their respective places and discussed the situation in silent conversation and gestures.

Fully drunk Kumbhakarna leaned back in his seat and was anxious to have a sound and comfortable sleep. Whenever the fanning stopped behind him, he opened his intoxicated eyes.

Sitting silently with ever changing thoughts, Vibhishana *serene*ly observed the assembly and the king.

Lowering his head and twirling his moustache, the king was engrossed in unending thoughts. 'Though I have abandoned many women in the past, the husbands, parents and relations of those women had left their women to their fate and remained silent but never attempted to fight with me. The spies are describing Sita's husband as a great warrior. They say, Sugriva has also stood in support of Rama with a huge army. Rama has been prattling for a long time that he would destroy Rakshasas and wipe out all the kingdoms of Rakshasas. So, after a long time, he will undertake the actual task under the pretext of his wife.

Will my retinue be ready for this battle? Will they think that Lanka is going for the battle just because I have brought Sita? Will the battle stop in case I return Sita? No hope. Even if there is hope, there is no question of giving Sita up. This Ravana is not a coward who gives up a woman whom he has possessed, out of fear of the enemy. He will completely destroy such a thought. But battle!.... threat of battle to Lanka kingdom!.... All these years, Lanka itself conquered every kingdom and has never surrendered to enemy occupation. Now, this battle. Is it inevitable? With an enemy like Rama.....!

Ravana moved every moment impatiently amidst the silk pillows on his throne. He looked inattentively with eyes down cast. In every look, he is expressing frustration and fear.

Every body in the assembly looks at the king's movements. Silent conversation increased. Since the capture of Hanuman, all the politicians had been of the opinion that a threat of battle to Lanka was inevitable.

Just as waves moved due to the throwing of a stone in a stationary lake, there began a tumult in the assembly with the entry of the spies.

The king who was lost in deep thought, anxiously raised his head as the spies entered.

The chief spy bowed in front of the throne obediently. "Your Excellency! The enemy has reached the shore on the other side of the sea. He is making preparations to cross the sea." He appealed and returned with his retinue as quickly as he had entered.

The attack on Lanka would occur as soon as the enemy crossed the sea!

Shocked but twirling his moustache, the king looked at the assembly with downcast eyes. Fresh news confused the assembly. As the king began to speak with a *serene* smile, the assembly became silent.

Seeing the assembly, Ravana started. "You might have realised why I have called all of you so urgently. Lanka is going to *sink in the threat of battle.* Our enemy Rama has started to attack Lanka with the help of the Vanara king. What should we do now? What is our duty? Can Rama besiege Lanka? Even if he besieges it, can he win the battle? — Think about all these things. How can I decide this task without consulting wise men and relatives like you? Submit what your opinions are." He looked at every one *serene*ly.

The king's serenity could not conceal his worry about the imminent battle.

Everybody in the assembly was surging with enthusiasm to give him courage, encourage, please the king, and be dearer to him. Racing one another, they expressed their views.

"Your Excellency! There can never be a threat of battle to Lanka. Not only Sri Rama, even if Devendra descends, he cannot conquer Lanka. Is there a dearth of weapons? Dearth of strength and capacities? Dearth of experiences in the battles? There is no dearth of any thing. We are not ignorant of battles. Did you not invade the city of Bhogavati and conquer Nagaraja? Shankha, Takshaka and Vasuki are great warriors among Nagas. Such warriors too surrendered to you! You have subdued Varuna putras and Kalakeyas! You have fought battles with Yama, the great warrior! Even gods are afraid of you and tremble with fear!" **350**

"Is it enough? Your Excellency, listen to my submission. A hero among warriors like you is not afraid of battle. You have destroyed many enemies in the past battles. You had tortured many, subjected them to mental agony, and demonstrated your strength and valour. You have made many people lame, blind, limbless and suppressed their arrogance. In your heroic battles, you have separated mothers and children, wives and husbands, well wishers and friends and taught them a lesson….."

"Your Excellency! Although Kubera is your elder brother, you had mercilessly driven away him out of anger when he occupied the kingdom, which ought to have belonged to you?

"Although Surpanakha is your own sister, you killed her husband since he attempted to fight with you. Even the closest relationships cannot stand before your determination."

"When Madhuvu abducted Kumbhinasi, you gave him amnesty without punishing Madhuvu even though you were capable of it. You have the capacity to punish or protect any one." **351**

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350. Whenever we come across names like Nagarajas, Varuna putras, Kalakeyas, gods, Yama, Devendra, Agnihotra, Brahma — we have to perceive all of them as human beings. We have to simply understand them as warriors belonging to other tribes. ★

351. Yuddha kanda, sarga 7, sloka 8: Kumbhinasi is the daughter of Ravana's mother's elder sister. Before her marriage, a Rakshasa called Madhuvu abducted her. A man of the same race carried her away. Kumbhinasi liked Madhuvu. Having come to know about the abduction of his sister by Madhuvu, Ravana went to fight with Madhuvu. Kumbhinasi requested Ravana not to do anything to her husband. Ravana made friends with Madhuvu and returned home. In the *Ramayana*, there are many incidents of the abduction and marrying of women — married or unmarried — by men. In the incident of Ravana abducting Sita, politics was the main issue. The episode of Kumbhinasi is in *Uttara kanda, sarga 25, slokas 20 to 54.* ★

"Why so many things about you? Your father-in-law gave his daughter to you in marriage since he admired the valour of your family members. Can the Vanara race stand in comparison with you, who have fought battles with many races? Can Rama stand in comparison with you, who have killed many heroes? Rama cannot be an equal to any of the warriors whom you have fought battles with. So what if he comes with Sugriva, Lakshmana or all armies?"

"Your Excellency! Is it not an insult to warriors like us if such a trivial thing upsets you? We will undertake this entire responsibility of fighting the battle. Don't worry!"

As he heard the words of those in the assembly, the king's face brightened. He observed the assembly with anxiety, which he could not hide.

My ministers, commanders, relatives — everybody is in favour of the battle. None mentions Sita. None exhibits opposition to the battle. It seems, I need not hesitate to fight.

Seeking all round the assembly with a *serene* smile, the king began to speak.

"Is Ravana — who is a terror for his enemies — worried about the battle? Will Ravana be afraid of a tribal army that has never seen the face of weapons? I am consulting you not because of any fear or morality. Men in the world are of three types: the best, the mediocre, and the base. The best man is one who consults his efficient ministers, relatives and friends; who puts his entire faith in god and carries on the task. A mediocre man is one who, although he believes in god, does not consult any other person, thinks alone and carries on the task. A base man is one who does not believe in god, who does not consult others and does things as he feels….."

As his sleep was disturbed due to the tumult in the assembly, Kumbhakarna was getting angry.

The king's speech continued. "…Just as there are distinctions among men, thoughts are also of three types: the best, the mediocre and the base. The best thought is one which is in accordance with what elders say traditionally and which all people accept unanimously. A mediocre thought is one which everybody entertains in his own way but which all people accept finally. A base thought is one, which everybody entertains in his own way and feels that unanimity of opinion is not necessary.[352]

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352. Yuddha kanda, sarga 6, slokas 13 to 15: (1) It is the best idea if we think in accordance with what elders say traditionally. (This is totally good.) (2) It is mediocre if everybody thinks in his own way but arrives at a consensus after discussion and argument. (This is turning towards a wrong thing from a good thing.) (3) It is base if everybody considers his own thought important and finds no use in consensus. (This is totally a bad thought.)

See how these morals turn upside down. (1) If people accept uncritically whatever the elders have been saying since long, where is the scope for a thought there? What remains there is to recall whatever elders have said. This method — which does not allow one's own thinking and willingness — is in fact a base method. (Totally bad.) (2) Arguments and discussions are essential. They lead to progress. But, if we insist that all people must finally abide by a single view after many discussions, does it not mean compromise on the part of some? In this method, we find compromise instead of determination. Yet, this method is somewhat better because there is some scope for arguments and discussions here. (A change toward good from complete badness.) (3) It is better to hold one's own view if we think consensus is not good. (The poet used the word *sreeyah*). Is consensus possible when there are different kinds of views and mutually contradictory opinions?... Will it be consensus? This is not a compromise with which people agree against their will. It is the best method to hold one's own views, thoughts and theory when they realise that consensus is not good. (This is completely a good method.)

➔

Therefore, I, who follow the advice of elders, am consulting all of you. You too should think together and advise me so that it will be good for my kingdom and my city.[353]

As he had heard his brother's speech on the best methods, Kumbhakarna's intoxication abated and anger overflowed. This man had great anger. He was not afraid of any one. He spoke out fearlessly whatever he wanted to say. He had affection for the king. Yet he could not restrain his anger. With disturbed sleep and reddened eyes, he looked at the throne impatiently. "Why do you talk so haphazardly. You say you are the best man. You talk of the best deeds. What has happened to all these best things when you abducted Sita? Whom did you consult about bringing Sita here? You went into the enemy's area alone. What would have happened to us if Rama had killed you then? Had all of us thought together and carried out that task, we would have taken a better decision.[354]

.....All right! Let it be. Though you did whatever you thought, you have done a good thing. You did something that has worried the enemy. So, you have to face the consequence, you need not fear this battle. Let Rama come or god himself come! We are not afraid. With my terrific weapons, I can send even Yama to Yama's world. Don't worry. Happily drink wine and *float in comforts and luxuries*", Kumbhakarna *sank back in a drunken stupor*, falling back into his seat. It was as if thunder had thundered and stopped. The king looked affectionately with a smile at his brother who was asleep again and sighed with relief. Touching every one, the king's looks paused for a while on Vibhishana who was immersed in a sea of thought and then turned towards Prahasta.

Prahasta was the chief commander and a minister. He always behaved in accordance with the wishes of the king. He got up form his seat, saluted the throne and began to speak heroically,

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➔ In this manner, when we think about what the poet has said, all these morals turn upside down.

"Don't think on your own. Do as elders say. That is the best way" — what does this mean? This is to prevent people from thinking independently. This is the objective of feudal morals. People should not think independently. They ought to accept the morals, which kings ordain. They have to abide by those principles only. All these morals are intended for women and the labouring Sudras. All these are meant not for the kings, rich men and upper castes but for those who ought to be subordinate.

"The best man is one who carries out a task after consulting his relatives, friends and ministers", said Ravana. Doesn't he? But, Ravana himself did not follow this best method. Observe this fact mentioned later. ★

[353] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 6, sloka 19:** "As there is hostility with the Vanaras, you have to think about an action that will be good for my city and my army", says Ravana. He does not say, 'our kingdom, our city and our army'. Kings consider kingdoms, cities, armies and every thing as their own personal belongings. They do not take others into confidence in these matters. ★

[354] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 21, slokas 27 to 29:** Hearing Ravana's lamentation (*lamentation due to pain of sexual desire for Sita!*), Kumbhakarna said very angrily, "Your Excellency! You thought alone and abducted Sita. Had you thought together with us about it, you would have been stable. (*You need not feel sorry*). Thinking about it now is like *providing banks for a stream that has run dry*. Had you consulted us before you had abducted Sita, our task would have been better." — This is the practice of justice by kings. We need not think that the poet has depicted Ravana as some one who says one thing and does another because he is a wicked man. This behaviour applies to every one: Dasaratha, Rama and Sugriva. ★

"Your Excellency! Give me the responsibility of protecting Lanka! Command me! Compared to the battles that you have waged in the past, is this battle with the Vanara army also a battle? If you say 'yes', I will see that there is no Vanara left in this animate and inanimate world. There are many warriors like me under your control. Have you forgotten how heroically Indrajit waged the battle against the armies of the gods? When Indrajit fought heroically amidst those four wings of the army, in the midst of squads of elephants, squads of horses and rain of weapons and captured Devendra and brought him to Lanka, was it not Brahma who saw that he is let off out of mercy? When we have a great warrior like Indrajit, why do we hesitate to fight against Rama?

Indrajit looked at the assembly full of smiles.

"Why do you need Indrajit for this job, Your Excellency?" Durmukha rose up angrily. "Do you need Indrajit to fight the mob of Vanaras? Am I not enough alone?"

Vajradamshtra rose with great enthusiasm. "Annihilating all the enemy armies, I will return comfortably. Thrashing Sugriva, killing Hanuman, I will send Rama and Lakshmana as relatives of *Yama*. No doubt about it. But I will submit an idea, which I have. Some of our warriors should go to Rama in disguise and tell him, "We have come from Kosala. Bharata has sent us. He has very important work with you. He has asked you to return at once." Then Rama will believe it and go back along with the army. Then there will be neither a battle nor anything else. *Why do we need an axe when we can use our nails*? What do you say?" He looked around with a smile.

All began laughing. Some people felt annoyed. "Rama may not be such a stupid man. The man who has come with a desire for battle will not return so easily. He will not believe anything you say", they said quickly.

"We can't say that. He might believe it!" Discussion went on in a corner. "Yet, why can't we try? Send spies and make them say so! We don't want the menace of battle"

Nikumbha rose from his seat. He was Kumbhakarna's son. "I feel like laughing to see you think in so many ways about the battle with Rama", he laughed and sat down.

"Yes, I too feel the same way" Vajrahanuvu rose up with a smile. "None of you need to come to the battle. All of you take rest comfortably at your homes. Drinking wines of your choice and eating meat, float in pleasures. I will alone go to the battle field and come back after finish the job."

All those present in the assembly were becoming so capable that they could kill enemies *with one hand*. Everybody was anxious to receive the king's appreciation. All of them knew that a battle was not some thing, which one or two people could do. Even if they said, "I will go alone to the battle", they know that they need not go alone. Moreover, great warriors who could go alone to the battle emerged.

All people in the assembly took oaths heroically — except Vibhishana!

The high tide of enthusiasm in favour of the battle was surging forward in the assembly.

Vibhishana's heart was also waiting on its wings for the battle! More than Sita, was Vibhishana who was anxiously waiting for Rama's arrival in Lanka.

To Vibhishana who was hopefully awaiting the relatives of any woman whom the king had abducted will invade Lanka.... a way to fulfil his hope appeared in the form of Sita after a long time. He was under mental pressure how to behave in the event of Rama's attack on Lanka. The same thoughts, which had always been worrying him, whirled in his head again and again.

'I have been hearing that Rama is a great warrior who excels my brother. If my brother loses this battle and Rama wins, the kingdom of Lanka will be the property of Rama. If it happens so, how will it benefit me? I must try to get Lanka. If Rama has to win, I will join Rama's camp and cooperate with him. But... will Rama believe me?.... Will he admit me in to his camp? I have confidence that he will admit me. Will Hanuman not report all the incidents that have happened in Lanka?....Will

Rama not grasp that I am opposed to Ravana?.... What I hear about Rama, it appears that he is a great politician. His political wisdom is evident from his capture of Kishkindha through Sugriva instead of Vali. Such a man... Can't he understand that I don't belong to Ravana's camp?.... I have to behave in such a way that Rama will take me into his confidence.....'

The tumult in the assembly disturbed Vibhishana's thoughts.

The assembly was swinging with a fanatic desire for battle.

It was rocking with heroic speeches.

Vibhishana looked at the king side ways. He was in doubt. Was the king hesitant out of fear about Rama's valour? Would he hand over Sita without a fight? What is this stupid thought of mine?... Don't I know that the king will not accept it?.... In case he accepts and hands over Sita?.... Will Rama return to Ayodhya without a battle? How stupid, I am! Is Rama waging a battle for the sake of his wife?.... Did Rama not scheme for the destruction of Rakshasas even before Ravana abducted Sita! Rama would have invaded the kingdoms of the Rakshasas even if the abduction of Sita had not taken place. Then... instead of the battle on pretext of freeing his wife, he would have searched for another 'pretext'.

We need not believe that Rama invading Lanka for the sake of rescuing his wife.... It is doubtful if Rama will accept his wife again. Except in some tribal races, can the men of civilized races accept their women back after other men have kept them in their possession?

The purpose of Rama's invasion is the expansion of the kingdom and not rescuing his wife. Even if Ravana is hesitant to fight the battle and hand over Sita, I need not worry that Rama will stop the battle. Somehow, he will certainly invade Lanka.

Rama's camp has more physical force. There is a great possibility of a victory for Rama.

Some how I must leave this country and join Rama. I must use all my abilities and tactics and assist Rama's victory. If Rama is not victorious, all my hopes will be in vain. *I will lose both ways like a washerman who has lost the clothes both in the river as well as on its bank.* Well.... How should I go away? Fleeing secretly will not be wise. I will appear a criminal in the eyes of the public. I must ensure that the king himself banishes me in anger. That will be the right way.

Now what all I should do is to make the king angry. I must oppose battle against Rama. I must warn him to hand Sita over to Rama. I ought to praise the valour of the enemies with exaggeration. No king tolerates his enemy being praised. My brother will also increase his determination and vows to destroy the enemies. He will banish me for opposing war and praising the enemy....Then I can gladly leave the country... In case.... he imposes death sentence?.... Perhaps it may not happen. If it happens, then I can think of a way out. It will not be impossible for me to escape from the prison.

Every moment Vibhishana anxiously observed the assembly. Every time, he tried to get up but hesitated as he did not have enough courage.

The king was overwhelmed with uncontrollable joy because of the heroic vows of ministers and commanders. With a heroic emotion, he described the important incidents of past battles. "....Even Indra, Kubera and such heroes among heroes could not stand before me. Who is Rama? A stupid man. He is *playing with the mane of a sleeping lion*. He is *waking up the goddess of death*. Ignorant of my strength and ability, he is ready for battle against me. *Just as burning the elephant with burning sticks*, I will *drown* Rama *in the stream of my arrows*. After all, this Rama is the lowest of the lowest creatures." Ravana twirled his moustache.

Vibhishana rose from his seat with *serene* looks.

The assembly became silent at once. Vibhishana bowed obediently and saluted the throne. He stood up and *held his two hands together as a cup with reverence*.

"Your Excellency! All your servants have submitted whatever they felt. I will also submit to you whatever I think. Kindly listen. It is true that we have fought many battles in the past and won great victories. All our soldiers are also great heroes. There is no dearth of courage, strength and capabilities. But… we should note not only our valour but also our enemy's valour. Though the Vanaras are tribals and do not possess weapons, I have heard they are not ordinary people. Every one of them is a warrior. Every one is a Hanuman. Every one…."

"Stop Vibhishana, stop….. It is enough…." Many warriors in the assembly got angry with Vibhishana.

"Are they such big heroes? Are we such incapable ones?" Harsh questions darted from all the sides.

Vibhishana bowed obediently with a smile. "We are also heroes. But… they are heroes who excel us. Sri Rama who leads them is the most powerful man. I appeal to all of you that it is not politically correct to fight battles against those who are more valorous than us."

"Vibhishana! What is this silly argument? Are people without weapons more valorous than those with weapons? You are *exaggerating* the strength of the enemy, making a mountain out of a molehill. You are afraid of them and are trying to frighten us. When an enemy attacks us, can we spare him without teaching a lesson?"

Vibhushana looked with slight anger. "We have to teach a lesson to ourselves, not to Rama. Rama is not at fault in attacking Lanka. What is wrong in fighting the enemy who has abducted his wife?" He looked without hesitation.

Vibhishana's words sounded odd to all.

Frowning, the king looked serious.

A commander rose harshly. "Vibhishana! Why are you talking like a hypocrite, ignoring all the past incidents as if you do not know anything. Did His Excellency abduct Rama's wife unjustly? Have you forgotten what Rama did in Dandakaranya?"

Vibhishana *sprinkled a smile* with *serene* looks. "True, Rama killed our Khara in Dandakaranya. But, Rama did so for the sake of self-protection since Khara himself started a quarrel. So, we have to realise that there was no fault of Rama even in that."[355] He saw calmly.

Every body in the assembly was amazed at the attitude of Vibhishana. For some it caused uncontrollable anger. "Vibhishana! Are you not ashamed to argue that there is no fault of Rama's? You say that Khara went to quarrel unjustly! Didn't Rama torture and insult Surpanakha? Have you forgotten all that Rama did? Do you think we have forgotten it?"

Unperturbed, Vibhishana looked at the assembly with reverence. "I have heard Sri Rama is a man of justice, a sea of mercy and a scholar in ethics and moral science. Without understanding this fact, is it just to imprison Rama's wife with a vengeance? A desire for the woman of another man is not at all desirable or proper."

"Oh! You are preaching newer and newer moral principles. The king has brought many women before as well and married them, by persuasion or threats, hasn't he?"

"I have always criticised the king"

"You have never criticised him so severely"

"Yes. But such danger has never befallen before. Now a battle that will completely destroy Lanka is *sitting at the door like Yama of Time*. It is impossible for any one to save Lanka once Sri Rama invades her. Hostility with Rama is like enmity with *a great serpent with a thousand heads*.

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355. Yuddha kanda, sarga 9, slokas 13 & 14: See how Vibhishana defends Rama! "…..What harm did Sri Rama do to Ravana, the king of Rakshasas. As Khara himself transgressed and tried to attack him, Rama killed Khara in order to protect himself. Everybody in the world ought to protect their life in accordance with their strength?" Vibhishana argues that Rama killed Khara since Khara himself went to fight him. So, it is not Rama's fault. He is not bothered why Khara went to fight in the first place. ★

The king's eyes reddened with anger. Eulogies of the enemy were intolerable for the assembly.

Prahasta rose with fury. "Vibhishana! Speak your words to those who have never seen the face of battles or enemies. Were all the enemies against whom we fought incapable? Have we all these years fought against cowards and won those battles? Don't make Rama — who will bring a tribal army with him — a great hero. Under my protection, there will be no harm to Lanka. Rest assured!" He laughed and smiled.

Vibhishana looked at Prahasta seriously and said, "You are speaking arrogantly since you do not know the strength and capacity of Sri Rama. Prahasta! Rama's arrows are not ordinary, you know? They are *Brahma's staffs. Ropes of death*. As those arrows have not befallen you and not pierced your entire body, you are boasting like this. Just a man who cannot cross the ocean without a boat, a man without strength cannot conquer Rama.[356]

Our king who has vices, unable to realise what is good and what is bad, believes your words. If the king goes on a wrong path, ministers, close friends and everybody ought to put pressure on the king and bring him back on to the right path. All of you are enemies and not friends of the king. I am telling the truth fearlessly as I alone wish the king's welfare. We have to come out of this danger, by begging Rama's pardon. Battle with such a warrior is not desirable. Prahasta! None of the warriors in our kingdom can stand in comparison with him. Not only Nikumbha, Dhumra, Indrajit…or even the king… Confronting Sri Rama…. in the battle field….."[357]

"Stop. Don't open your mouth, any more…." Indrajit rose up hissing. "I cannot hear your shameless words any longer. Although you are my paternal uncle and older than me, I cannot stay without defying you. How dare you insult the king! You have shamelessly told the king to beg Rama's pardon! Rama himself ought to beg the pardon of the head of Lanka since he has insulted a woman of our race and harmed us by intruding into our Dandakaranya. I see only you in the Pulastya family who is a coward and a powerless man who does not react with self-respect against the deeds of the enemy. There is no question of a truce with Rama. This is a matter concerned with the fame and reputation of our race. Realise the fact that this battle is inevitable." Indrajit warned Vibhishana and sat down.

With unperturbed *serenity*, Vibhishana looked fearlessly and seriously. "My lad! You are still a kid. Emotion is not desirable when danger befalls one. You are unable to realise that hostility with Rama is dangerous to you. You are a great warrior but a fool. You are the son of the king but also his enemy. Encouraging the king into battle, you are driving him into the *face of the death*. However strongly I say that Sri Rama will completely destroy Lanka, you are not paying heed to me and feel arrogant. With arrogance that you know every thing, you are defying my sermons and boasting about yourself. A stupid boy like you — who takes hasty decisions ignorantly with half knowledge. Even a man who has called you for consulting you about politics also be killed.[358]

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[356] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 14, sloka 12:** "Just as it is not possible for a man to cross the sea without a boat, it is not possible for me, you and all Rakshasas to kill Rama who is capable." — Vibhishana confirms that it is not possible to cross the sea without a boat. This means, 'it is not possible to cross the sea flying', isn't it? But, Hanuman crossed the sea flying. Ravana too crossed flying. Even Vibhishana — who said it is not possible without a boat — crossed the sea later flying. The poet has been making many characters cross the seas flying. Yet he is talking logic that it is not possible to cross the sea without a boat." Well, any way he said flying is not possible. ★

[357] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 14, sloka 6:** Vibhushana is saying that even great Rakshasa-warriors cannot equal Rama. "Kumbhakarna, Indrajit, our king, Mahaparsha, Mahodara, Nikumbha, Kumbha, Atikaya — none of them is capable of confronting Rama in the battle", says Vibhishana. Addressing Ravana and telling him, "You are incapable. Your enemy is a great man. You are fit for nothing. Heed my advice" — is this the way of convincing the king? Does Vibhishana really want Ravana to heed his advice? All the attempts of Vibhishana are meant to make the king furious. ★

It seems none of you has thought about the welfare of Lanka. It seems you have not at all understood the miracle of Rama's arrows. They are not ordinary arrows. They move as speedily as the wind! They are diamond weapons of Indra! To escape from them….."

"Vibhishana! You are describing Rama's arrows so well! When did you taste those blows?" some body shouted.

Ignoring that ridicule, Vibhishana continued his speech exhibiting serenity. "Sri Rama is a man of justice! A great charioteer. A great valorous man born in the Ikshvaku family. All people love him. Unable to grasp that great man's war capabilities. You are talking like fools. Before Rama's arrows — which are like Yama's staff — cut off the heads of Rakshasas, hand over the lawful wife of Sri Rama along with money, grain, gifts, all kinds of ornaments and prostrate at the lotus feet of that god of mercy and …."

Ravana became furious and said hissing like a great serpent, "Stupid fellow! Stop your base talk!" He roared. "How dare you praise the enemy so much in my presence! You are standing on the side of the enemy while calling yourself my close and trusted man. What is your intention in suggesting against my wish that I should give Sita up! Don't you have manliness to take revenge against the atrocity of Rama? Do you think you alone wish the welfare of Lanka? Don't be under the illusion that I have not realised the nature of your sermons! You are jealous of my being the head of Lanka, wealthy and a terror to the enemies.

You have proved the common saying that kinsmen cannot tolerate the greatness of their fellow kinsmen. Just as an elephant assists to capture elephants, kinsmen cooperate to ruin kinsmen. Just as women are fickle minded and Brahmins have a sense of restraint, kinsmen have vileness.[359]

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358. Yuddha kanda, sarga 15, slokas 10 to 12: See how Vibhishana is abusing Indrajit! "You must be killed. Or a bad minded man — who called a hasty boy like you to a place where people discuss politics — should be killed" (*Vibhishana means that Ravana should be killed.*)

"You are a fool *who does not know what to do and what not to do*; you have not been reprimanded by elders, you have a cruel nature, you are a base fellow, you are vile and you are stupid. Because of your youth you talk like this. You call your self a 'son of Ravana', appear to be his friend but in fact you are his enemy!" this is how the stream of abuses of Vibhishana went on. Is Indrajit a fool as Vibhishana has described? Is he incompetent to talk politics? Is it stupidity to call a person to discuss about battles though he participated in great battles and been victorious? Is there any single justifiable word in what Vibhishana has spoken? Indrajit must be killed! Even the person who has called Indrajit to the assembly too must be killed! It is such a blunder to call Indrajit to the assembly! — The reason for the unjustified nature of Vibhishana's words is that his thoughts are hypocritical. The poet is struggling a lot to project Vibhishana as a very good man. Let us suppose that Vibhishana is a very good man and he took liberty and abused Ravana and Indrajit out of his anxiety that he does not want Lanka to face the threat of a battle. Then why should Vibhishana have so much reverence and respect for Rama who is their enemy? What is the need for him to argue that Rama is not at fault? Is it necessary to show reverence and respect toward the enemy, in order to argue against the battle? The hypocrisy of Vibhishana is revealed always through his words and behaviour. ★

359. Yuddha kanda, sarga 16, sloka 19: "Cows have the nature to provide wealth. Brahmins have a control of senses. Women are fickle minded. Kinsmen have a dangerous mentality", says Ravana. Ravana too has the same views as Rama has on Brahmins and women. Reverence for Brahmins and a low opinion of women. ★

A base man like you does not deserve to live in my kingdom." Ravana *showered fire from* his *eyes*.

Those last few words that came from the mouth of the king drowned Vibhishana in joy and ecstasy. *Dumping sorrow on his face*, he bowed as if he was shocked and saluted the king. "Your Excellency! I have caused you anger. Pardon me. I don't have any other thought except to wish your welfare. Don't get upset. Anger destroys the sense of justice. It will annihilate peace and happiness. Don't dismiss the words of this servant. There is no other way except to give Sita Devi up. One has to abandon a thing — however much one may like it — if it causes a quarrel. Lanka should stay safe. You — who protect Lanka — should stay safe. Hand over Sita Devi to Sri Rama and follow justice. Abandon injustice."

"Stop your prattle. None needs to preach me what is justice and what is not. Don't overstep your limits," Ravana looked seriously and stopped talking.

Vibhishana had a doubt that the king might pardon him. He felt very disappointed that the king had not got angry enough to banish him. In an attempt to arouse intolerable anger in the king by talking more boldly, he spoke carelessly. "Your Excellency! My good words have not entered your ears. Doomsday is approaching you. Your life is at an end. None can save you from Sri Rama. Whether you fly into the sky, hide in the nether world, hide in the lap of death and even if all gods save you, Rama's arrows will not spare you. At least listen to my words…."

Ravana became furious. "Oh!! Traitor to the king! Listen to my words! I banish you. Leave my kingdom at once. I can live with the *serpent of death* but it is a great sin to live with an enemy like you in the guise of a friend. You base fellow!.... Leave kingdom of Lanka right now… Realise this, that out of mercy that you are my sibling, I am sparing you the death penalty!" [360]

With the roaring of the king, Vibhishana lowered his head. "Your pleasure, my lord! You are like my father. You are entitled to either protect or punish me. But those who wished your total ruin have become your friends and I who wished your welfare have become your enemy. Making terrible accusations against me, you are mercilessly keeping me at a distance. If my absence pleases you, I will leave now. I want you to live happily. Protect yourself. Save Lanka. Save the race of Rakshasas. I always wish you well! You should get victory. Now, *I take leave from your feet*." Wiping his eyes with the ends of his upper garment, he saluted again and turned back reverently.

The assembly became silent. All remained silent indicating none had opposed the king's decision.

Wiping his tears, Vibhishana walked in front of the seats of important people in the assembly.

Like a volcano which suddenly erupts and then become calm, Ravana's fury abated and he cooled down. [361]

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360. Ravana did not impose the death penalty on Vibhishana. Nor put him in prison.

Since Rama needed Vibhishana very much, the poet made Ravana banish Vibhishana. He sent Vibhishana at once to Rama from Lanka. The fact that he sent a traitor who was ready to join the enemy camp at a time of battle — means Ravana was an utterly foolish man. The poet makes Ravana out to be a fool all the time.

To drive a story in such a way that Vibhishana meets Rama, the poet need not have banished Vibhishana. Even if he had been imprisoned, Vibhishana could have escaped. Then it would not have meant that Ravana had acted foolishly. The story will go its own way. Except the anxiety to do things favourable for Rama, the poet has no other thought. ★

361. In Valmiki *Ramayana*, there are three scenes in which Vibhishana preaches Ravana morals. This means, the same thing happens repeatedly. ➔

Like children who play continuously without feeling bored, the sea continuously roars without feeling bored.

"Can human beings cross me?" the sea wonders proudly every moment.

The Vanara army relaxed under the trees along the shore.

The soldiers who were searching for the enemy roamed about cautiously.

All the Vanaras looked at a distance five persons coming in the direction of where they were stationed. Those persons had on shining expensive garments, ornaments and weapons.

Sugriva also saw those newcomers. As soon as he saw them, he hid behind his ministers. Frowning from behind their shoulders, he said, "….. Those who are coming are Rakshasas…. no doubt about it. See their guise… weapons? Why?.... They are coming to kill all of us…. Rakshasas are by nature great warriors. Moreover in their hands…. cudgel-sized swo…. rds…." He controlled his shivering.[362]

All the Vanaras curiously looked at those who were coming towards them. "They are Rakshasas but why will they kill us?.... If you say, 'yes', your Excellency! See what we will do to them." The Vanaras were enthusiastic to thrash those new comers.

Looking again, as it were, through the armpits of his minister, Sugriva said, "Hell with those fellows! They are coming this side!" He moved further into the armpits of his ministers.

Those who were coming arrived without hesitation and fear. One of them came forward.

The warriors surrounding Sugriva moved aside, brought Sugriva to the front and said, "This man is our king. *We are not our kings*."

Sugriva tried to retreat but as there was no scope, he gritted his teeth, backed on to Nila and stood trying to control his shivering.

Seeing Sugriva, the man who came forward from among those Rakshasas said, "Sir! I don't know who you are. My name is Vibhishana. I have came from Lanka. You know Ravana. I am the younger brother of that very vile man. I do not at all approve of my brother abducting Sita Devi. Right from the beginning, I have opposed my brother's acts. I prayed to him many a time to give back Sita Devi to Sri Rama Chandra. Just as a man whose last days

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➔ The first time: He tells in the assembly not to go for a battle and give back Sita to Rama (*Kumbhakarna was not present in the assembly*). The second time: He goes to Ravana's chamber, tells him how bad omens are seen across the country and preaches to him. The third time: Again, in the assembly, he resumes abuses, morals and warnings. (*Kumbhakarna is present this time in the assembly*). In this assembly, Ravana tells Kumbhakarna, "You woke up after being asleep for six months. Hence you were not aware that I have brought Sita." (*It was ten months since he had brought Sita. This means that Kumbhakarna was awake when Ravana had brought Sita*).

In this assembly, Vibhishana abuses Prahasta, Indrajit and the king and preaches to them. (*Abuses are all right but he bored every one a lot with his morals*). By then the king had become furious and banished Vibhishana. I have depicted all the incidents of these three scenes in one scene.

In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, after the king had asked him to go away, Vibhishana swiftly flew into the sky along with his followers, hovered in the sky for a while, abused Ravana and then flew away. ★

[362] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 17, slokas 2 to 5:** Vibhishana paused in the sky along with four followers. "Stationed on the ground the Vanara commanders looked at Vibhishana, who looked like a peak of Mount Meru and stood in the air like a dazzling flash of lightning.

See, what Sugriva said on seeing Vibhishana. "Vanaras! A Rakshasa that has all weapons is coming with four Rakshasas to kill us. Look at him. There is no doubt!" Seeing the enemies, this great Valorous king Sugriva — keeping crores of warriors round him — *shivered valorously*! ★

approach refuse to take medicine, that stupid man has not heeded my words. Moreover, he has insulted and abused me in a full assembly, and banished me from the country. Leaving my wife and children and accompanied by loyal followers, I have come to seek refuge in Sri Rama. I have heard that Sri Rama is a sea of mercy. Where is that great man? Please be kind to me and submit all my details to that pious man!" He stood there *obediently with folded hands*.

Sugriva's shivering abated a bit. *Dancing of cheeks and music of teeth stopped*. Frowning, Sugriva looked at Vibhishana and turned away without any response. Slowly, moving aside and back, making way… reached Rama. "He says, he is Vibhishana! Ravana's younger brother! Has come away from Lanka… Well! Who believes?.... We can't say anything about enemies….They say that many infiltrate. May be they are spies! Slowly…. Unless we know all his details…."

Rama listened with excitement. "Is it Vibhishana? Has he come? Has he come to us?" Rama's face became bright with uncontrollable joy. But he controlled it. "Sugriva! Who told you this news?"

"Why need others tell me? He himself spoke to me. He says his brother has banished him. Who can believe him? He says he has come to seek refuge in you! I don't believe him, you know!... Slowly infiltrating into our camp… with an intention to kill all the important people… Alas!... who else? You and me!... No… We should never believe Rakshasas. How clever they are!...."

Rama was overwhelmed with boundless joy… None of the words of Sugriva entered his ears. *Joy is cutting all its embankments*.

The entire attention of Rama had been on Vibhishana since Hanuman had reported news about Lanka. He had been waiting to see if he would receive some news from Vibhishana. Why just news! He himself had arrived!

Vibhishana was not a spy. He did not belong to the enemy camp. Totally reliable. He wished for his brother's ruin.

Like Sugriva, he had a desire for the kingdom… It was essential for him to join me. I will come to know many secrets of Lanka. A victory in the battle will be easy.

Rama's lips blossomed with smiles. His *eyes shone with hope*.

Sugriva was still talking. "….An owl joins the crows and kills them, have you seen it? Similarly, these people also may kill us…. we shouldn't at all believe them. We must impose the death penalty on Vibhishana. There is no other way…. What can we do otherwise…..?"

With *serene* looks, Rama asked very calmly, "Where is that gentleman?" He controlled his excitement.

"Ah, yes! He is there. Our people are round him. *If he moves, they will remove his skin*. He thought we would believe whatever false things he tells us. We believe soldiers who work on a salary but can we believe enemies who defect and want to join us?[363] Why further delay?

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363. Yuddha kanda, sarga 17, sloka 22:

Sugriva is explaining the distinctions within an army. "The forces which friends send (*Mitra balam),* the forces of tribals (*Atavii balam*), the forces that have been there regularly (*muula balam*), the forces whom we employ by giving salary (*bhrutyu balam*) — we can accept these forces. But we should abandon the forces that come from the enemy camp."

Muula balam (Regular army): There is always an army with the king permanently. It receives maintenance from the king. This is the Regular army.

Bhrutyu balam (Mercenaries): During the times of battles, a king's regular army is not enough. The king has to mobilise some army on a temporary basis. The mercenary army is one, which the king mobilises by paying a salary for a specified period.

Mitra balam (Allied forces): During the periods of battles, other kings who are friends of a king send their forces as help. Such are allied forces.

➔

Quickly.... That death penalty....."

Rama nodded his head *serenely*. Seeing Angada, Hanuman, Jambavan and other important persons round him, he said, "All that your king has said is reasonable. Yes, we should not do anything without applying our thought. We have to think carefully what to do in the case of Vibhishana. Tell me what all of you think about it." He lowered his head.

All the important Vanaras were overwhelmed with joy and said, "Oh, Ramayya, is there any thing that you do not know? You are asking our opinions because of your goodness. But you know every thing as to how to accomplish a given task. You are well versed in all the scriptures. Does anybody need to tell you?" They felt happy, praising Rama.

Angada began to talk. "I too heard Vibhishana's words. He talks like a trustworthy person. But just because of that how can we believe a man from the enemy camp? They behave loyally until they find the right time to strike. We will not be able to realise the actual thing until they have completed their intended task. If we admit Vibhishana into our camp just because he has come here and sought refuge, there will be more harm than good...." He paused.

"It is alright if we admit Vibhishana and keep a watch on his activities", a commander called Sarabha pushed himself forward, in a hurry that somebody else may also suggest this idea.

Jambavan was about to speak and all others listened to him attentively because he was an elderly and experienced person. "Ravana is our diehard enemy. His brother is also our enemy. Should we be friends with the younger brother while maintaining hostility with the elder brother? Finally, the brothers will become one and unite.... It is better to ask him to leave", said Jambavan.

Nodding his head with a lot of dissatisfaction, Rama looked at the rest of the people. Mainda came forward. "We need not tell him to go away but as Sarabha suggested, we should admit him and watch him secretly for some time. He has abused the older brother, hasn't he? Then we have to watch how he talks in our absence," said Mainda curiously. He was

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➔*Aatavika balam* (Jungle/Irregular army): When a king is compelled to increase his army, he mobilises those who do not have military discipline and who are not well versed in military skill. Such forces are *Aatavika balam*.

These categories apply not only to the armies of the kings but also the present day military. Every government has a 'regular army', which we can call *muula balam*. The governments import armies from other countries just as they buy arms. These armies come from one country to another simply on some 'economic conditions'. These are Mercenaries who work temporarily. We can compare them with *bhrutyu balam*.

Even today, a government sends forces to another government whenever there is a need, depending upon its political character. Such forces are *mitra balam*.

During an emergency and for certain tasks, a government may engage goons, pickpockets, beggars, prostitutes (the so-called 'Lumpen' or 'Ruined' proletariat) in the military and police. In addition, it releases murderers and bandits from prisons and uses them in certain specific activities. Such masses as these do not possess training or skill concerning the military. We can compare these people with *Atavi balam*.

The different categories among the armies, which Sugriva has mentioned, have been there from the days of ancient kings to the present. The reason for this is that the societies of the past and the present are based on 'exploitative private property'.

All the 'soldiers' belong to the working classes. They pursue this occupation merely for the sake of their livelihood and give up their lives.

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so enthusiastic that it appeared that he himself wanted to spy on Vibhishana.

Every body spoke quickly whatever ideas they had. Some were totally opposed to admitting Vibhishana. Some said he could be admitted by tying up his feet, hands and mouth!

On the whole, all were suspicious of Vibhishana and opposed to admitting him in their camp. This made Rama very uncomfortable.

Rama was upset with thoughts. 'Sugriva's ministers were at least were inclined to think a little bit about Vibhishana, but Sugriva insisted that Vibhishana be killed at once. Will it be correct if I defy the suggestions of so many people and decide otherwise? Will Sugriva and his loyal men not get angry? But how foolish it would be to lose Vibhishana? There will be no worse stupidity than sending him away. I should not care about the words of these fools. It will be impossible to conquer Lanka if we don't admit Vibhishana into our camp.

Recovering from his thoughts and realising that Hanuman had not spoken anything, Rama looked at him as if asking, "Do you too feel the same way?"

Hanuman too thought about Vibhishana. As Rama had talked to him through his looks, Hanuman looked with embarrassment. "Am I so wise a person to advise you? What do I know more than others do? It is true that it causes fear if we have to believe the enemy. But I think we need not suspect Vibhishana....", he paused. Hesitating that Sugriva may get angry if he says 'no' to what the king had said, Hanuman exhibited all his cleverness humbly. "......It was Vibhishana who saved me in Lanka, wasn't it? If he hadn't, *would I be able to see your faces again*? It seems he has always been opposed to his brother. Doesn't he know that his brother is wicked?.... Ramayya! He had heard about you before, hadn't he?.... You.... killing Vali.... giving kingdom to Sugriva.... everybody knows all these things.... He must have hoped that he would get such a benefit if he sought refuge in you. He must have really come with the intention of joining your camp. Such a person will do us good and never harm. Mainda and others said, as if they know something, that we must keep a watch on Vibhishana. But how is it possible? If we don't believe him, how bad he will feel about it? Well, I don't have any suspicion that he has come here with any conspiracy", Hanuman concluded.

Rama was extremely amazed to see that Hanuman had grasped the entire motive of Vibhishana. 'Such a tribal man too was able to grasp the secrets, which are intelligible only to great wise men and politicians like me. If others realise the fact that Vibhishana had come to join the enemy camp with a selfish motive, will they not find fault with me if I admit him. Even if I defend it as a matter of politics, what mercy will there be in giving refuge to a man who fearlessly has become hostile to his brother with a selfish motive? I should not mention more about the selfishness of Vibhishana'.

Observing everybody with *serene* looks and nodding his head, Rama said, "All your thoughts are very good. Vibhishana might have come with a selfish motive. Or might have come without any selfishness but because Ravana has imposed a sentence on him. How am I concerned whether he came with a friendly feeling or enemy feeling? Because danger has befallen him, he has come seeking my refuge. That is important for me. Good people never refuse those who seek refuge in them."

"Then why did you ask our opinions?" said somebody from a corner, as he felt annoyed.

However much he searched with his eyes to identify who had resorted to such a bold act, Lakshmana could not catch that person in the midst of that crowd.

Since Hanuman said Vibhishana had left his brother and joined Rama for the sake of getting the kingdom, all incidents began *moving beneath* Sugriva's *heart*....that he too had schemed with Rama.... got his brother killed... occupied the kingdom and so on.

"So, Vibhishana is also the same kind of fellow as you are", somebody from within said boldly.

"Tut! I am not that sort," Sugriva shouted at somebody within him and frowned. Looking at Rama angrily, he said, "I don't understand why you are thinking about the enemy so much…We should have had him and his ministers killed…. It is already very late…. abandoned his brother in this difficult time, does he come to the enemy?.... He left his brother in danger…. ugh…. I don't understand how people do such vile acts….." Sugriva looked around frowning as if to say, "I can't do such things, you know!"

Rama looked sideways at Sugriva as if to say: "Yes! You cannot do any vile acts. Every body knows how good you are." Rama looked at Sugriva seriously as a warning. Turning towards Lakshmana, he smiled and said, "Lakshmana! Have you seen how Sugriva talks? Those who have not read moral sciences alone speak like this. Even if he has not read them, Sugriva, it seems, has not learnt from the experience of the elders." Rama looked again at all the elders around him.[364]

"The king must always remember one important moral. Co-heirs and neighbouring kings are always enemies. When they find a suitable time, they try to harm you. This is *very natural in the world*. But there are very good co-heirs also. Yet, due to the fear for wicked co-heirs, very good kings also suspect good people. Then will the wicked kings not suspect their co-heirs? Though Vibhishana is a very good man, Ravana is a wicked man, isn't he? He suspected, humiliated and banished his sibling unjustly. Just because they are siblings, do all people behave nobly…. A son like me who behaves with humility and obedience to his father and a brother like Bharata ….can't be found." Rama glanced at Sugriva sideways.

Rama realised that Sugriva had bent his head as if he had felt slighted. Immediately he shined a smile on his face. "Sugriva! Also, there isn't a friend like you in the world, you know! None can equal you in being helpful to friends." Again, he looked at him with a smile.

Lakshmana's commonsense hissed. 'A brother like Bharata? Then what about the devotion of Lakshmana?'

The fact that Lakshmana felt slighted had not entered Rama's mind.

Sugriva moved a little, raised his head and adjusted his jewels.

While Sugriva adjusted his jewels, Rama turned his head aside quickly.

Sugriva was very happy that Rama had appreciated him and called him a good friend. But appreciated Vibhishana and called him a

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364. Yuddha kanda, sarga 17, sloka 27 and sarga18, slokas 5 & 6: See Sugriva's opinion of Vibhishana! "Because he is the brother of Ravana, the sinner, we have to punish and kill this Vibhishana along with his ministers….We have to abandon this Rakshasa and should not admit him. This Vibhishana left his brother who is in danger. Such a man as this, whom will he follow at a time of danger?" says Sugriva. What did he (Sugriva) do to his brother (Vali)? While his brother was fighting with the enemy (Dundubhi), did he not abandon his brother in danger, by placing a boulder so that he would not come out of the cave?... Those who do wrong are anxious to make the world forget their wrongs. They want to be considered as very good persons by saying. "Ugh! See what they have done? If I were in their position, I wouldn't do that, you know!"

Sugriva too had the same anxiety. But it was not the intention of the poet to say, "See how hypocritical Sugriva is! The poet says Sugriva is a very good man and hence he had thought about the welfare of Rama and argued against admitting Vibhishana into their camp.

Sarga 18, slokas 6 to 8: See Rama's comments on what Sugriva said: "Laughing, Sri Rama said to Lakshmana as follows: One who has not read scriptures and not grasped the specialised meanings by serving elders speaks as the Vanara king Sugriva has spoken". Because Sugriva did not want to admit Vibhishana, Rama ridiculed Sugriva out of annoyance. It is like saying, "You are an illiterate! What do you know! Yet you are rejecting my words."

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noble man.... well... I don't know! Is Vibhishana a noble brother like me?

'If Rama admits Vibhishana... if he makes friends not only with me but also with Vibhishana.... No..." Sugriva shook his head.

Disregarding all the ridicule of Rama and ignoring all the noble morals that Rama had preached, Sugriva said again, "So.... then... when.... to kill Vibhishana." He looked anxiously.

Rama's *eyes turned into burning embers.* He was about to look at Sugriva disapprovingly but controlled himself. "Sugriva! There is no question of killing Vibhishana. Vibhishana has sought my protection. I will not abandon the person who has sought my protection...." He said firmly. "....In the past, a hunter requested a pigeon to satiate his hunger and save him. That pigeon, despite the fact that the hunter was a cruel person who had killed its mate, gave its own body and saved the hunter since moral science tells us to save those who had sought our protection. If a pigeon can save a refugee, can I — who have studied all the scriptures — live without giving protection to those who have sought it? The great sage Kandu said, we must protect even a sinner. If we do so, we get fame and heaven, the scriptures say. Even if Vibhishana is a wicked person, he cannot harm a great hero like me. I will not let him go without protecting him. Sugriva! Didn't I save you when you sought refuge in me?.... It will be the same with any one who asks me for refuge! Even if Ravana comes and seeks refuge in me, I will protect him, do you understand? – Go! Get Vibhishana here!" Rama commanded and looked serious, unable to control his anger however much he tried.[365]

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[365] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 18, slokas 11 to 35:** Rama's arguments to admit Vibhishana: "As we find pundits among Rakshasas too, we have to admit Vibhishana" (*Among all the Rakshasas, only Vibhishana emerged as a pundit! Lone pundit!*)

"Vibhishana is afraid of Ravana and came here. Hence we have to accept him." (*Though Hanuman had told him that Vibhishana had come out of selfishness, Rama did not reveal it!*)

Though Rama argued in various ways in this manner, Sugriva did not agree. He insisted on killing Vibhishana.

Then Rama gave his final decision. "If we don't protect a person who has sought refuge in us, it will be difficult for me in the other world. I will follow the sayings of sage Kandu.... Even if Vibhishana is a wicked man, what can he do to me? If I wish, I can kill with the tip of my thumb all the ghosts, Yakshas, Danavas and Rakshasas on the earth! (*Yes, we know the power of your finger and feet! We know better than you do how much you are scared and how many people have to give you courage even a small danger befalls you!*) I will protect those who seek refuge in me from all elements of creation. This is my vow. Whether the refugee is Vibhishana or Ravana, I will give him an assurance of protection. O, best among the monkeys! Call him!" Thus, Rama concluded that the reason for admitting Vibhishana was that he had sought refuge. Then why should he say, "Tell me your opinions. I can't decide on my own." It would have been appropriate had he first said at the beginning, "Has Vibhishana come? Get him! He has sought refuge. So I admit him into our camp."

If the entire army is that of Sugriva, the question of admitting or not admitting enemies must be done as per Sugriva's wishes. But all powers connected with the army are in the hands of Rama. Because Sugriva himself is in Rama's hand.

"Vibhishana has come with a selfish motive. He wants us to kill his brother. Therefore, he will work for our victory and will not do us harm. With this confidence, we can admit Vibhishana." — This is how Rama could have declared. But if Rama had showed this reason, he would not have got the credit that he had given refuge to Vibhishana.

➔

Grasping Rama's annoyance, Sugriva put a smiling face with hesitation. "Yes! You know every thing: what is right and what is wrong. You are a great man of justice.... well... because he is our enemy..... I thought it would have been better.... I thought that he might kill us....Hence, I said so many a time. All right! Do as you please! As you said.... He may be a good fellow.... Even if he is not.... how can he kill us when we are so many people." [366]

Look....! Angada! You go and get that gentleman!.... You must get him carefully, you see! Keep all our people round him and bring him here!.... Look! Did you listen to what I have told you?.... Be careful!.... Alas! He has already left. Has Angada heard properly or not...?" Adjusting his jewels, he moved towards Hanuman and sat down.

Folding his hands humbly and bowing his head, Vibhishana came with a *serene* walk. As soon as he came, he prostrated in front of Rama. "Lord! I am seeking refuge in you. Please be merciful to me! I have left the kingdom of Lanka.... My life and all comforts are under your control."

Looking at Vibhishana with *serene* looks, Rama asked, "How many brothers are you?"

"Three. Ravana, Kumbhakarna and I. Both my brothers are great warriors. They have fought many battles and are experts. They are not afraid of battles."

"Who are the important warriors in Lanka? Who holds what position? How big is the treasury? How many weapons are there? What are the details of the armies?"

Rama looked sideways at Vibhishana, wondering whether he would tell all the details that he had asked for. Folding his hands, Vibhishana confided all the details with humility and obedience.

"What is this? Instead of saying, 'All right', to a person who had asked for protection, why does he ask, 'How many weapons are there? How big is the treasury'...." One gentleman resounded his worry in the ears of another gentleman.

"He asked to come, hasn't he? Does it not mean giving assurance?"

"Should he ask all secrets as soon as he comes?"

"Ugh! Stop talking! Let me hear what they are talking" The 'gentleman of resounded ears' said irritably.

While Vibhishana was narrating, Rama was lost in amazement on the one hand and joy on the other.

➔ In the same context, see how Rama says how great Bharata and he are! **Sarga 18, sloka 16:** 'All younger brothers are not like Bharata. There isn't a son like me, a friend like you (Sugriva) and a younger brother like Bharata". When he wanted to recognize a good brother, he recognized Bharata. Why not Lakshmana? Lakshmana had come with him abandoning his wife and all comforts, hadn't he? Why didn't Rama recognise his service? The reason for praising Bharata is that he had given away the kingdom to his brother though he himself was entitled to it.

Compared to riches and wealth, love and service have no value. That is why, Rama had not recognized Lakshmana who had served him with devotion but considered Bharata as the best brother.

In Rama's view, his younger brothers ought to be obedient and be good brothers. But, in the case of others, younger brothers must deceive their elder brothers! Sugriva deceive Vali! Vibhishana ought to deceive Ravana! Those younger brothers who deceive their elder brothers are great! ★

366. **Yuddha kanda, sarga 18, sloka 38:** After Rama autocratically (*without caring anybody's opinion*) declared that it was a must to admit Vibhishana, Sugriva gave up his demand. "Even to one who has asked you to kill Vibhishana, it appears that he is pure. Because of his facial expressions, it is very clear to me that he is pure both inside and outside. (*Vibhishana has already become a pure man!*) Rama! You are aware of the principles of justice. What is surprising if you protect those who seek refuge?" He thus started his eulogy! ★

Is Ravana such a stupid man? In the context of battle... in such a dangerous time... Can he allow an important person to defect, when he knew all the secrets of the country? He ought to have imprisoned this man and kept him under stringent guard.....

Rama's heart was overwhelmed with joy that Vibhishana's arrival was for his good. It was not impossible to conquer Lanka if I had Vibhishana's help. Like Sugriva, I had Vibhishana too who would be obliged to accept my imperial hegemony. I have to make Vibhishana favourable to me so that he would have a change of heart and return to Lanka.

Rama said *serene*ly with a smile. "Vibhishana! I am giving you an assurance. I will kill Ravana and crown you as the king of Lanka. I swear in the name of my younger brothers", he vowed.

Unable to control his joy, Vibhishana again prostrated at the feet of Rama. "Sri Rama! Lord! I will do whatever I can for the sake of your victory and the defeat of Lanka. I will stand on your side and expend all my abilities to kill Ṛakshasas in the battle. Believe me!" [367]

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367. Yuddha kanda, sarga 19, slokas 1 to 26: Until Rama had sent a word to come, Vibhishana was in the sky along with his ministers! Airplanes keep flying in the sky when it is not possible to land in an airport. It was like that!

"When Sri Rama gave him his assurance, the very wise Vibhishana was very much pleased because he saw Sri Rama's qualities directly and then descended onto the earth from the sky along with his devoted ministers." Descending thus, Vibhishana prostrated at the feet of Sri Rama. "I am Ravana's younger brother. Insulted by him, I seek refuge in you, the perfect man and the saviour of all living beings... My life, kingdom, pleasures are under your control." (*'killing me or not killing me, my getting the kingdom or not getting the kingdom are dependent on your will', says Vibhishana! He is asking Rama to see that he gets the kingdom of Lanka.*)

After Vibhishana sought refuge in this manner, Rama did not immediately say, 'Yes'. He asked him openly, "Tell me truthfully what are the strengths and weaknesses of the Rakshasas." This is like saying, "Don't hide anything. I will see if you tell me the truth or not. Only then, I will think about giving you assurance!"

Unless he doubts whether Vibhishana tells him all the facts or conceals them, why does he say, "Tell me the truth!" After Vibhishana told Rama all those things that Rama wanted, Rama spoke words that pleased Vibhishana.

"Having heard Vibhishana's words, Sri Rama, the consistently valorous man thought well and said, 'Vibhishana! I will kill Ravana along with his friends and Prahasta. I will crown you the king of Lanka. I tell you that this will come true. I swear on my brothers'....." Thus, after extracting some information from Vibhishana, Rama assured him.

After this assurance, see what 'virtuous Vibhishana' said, "Having heard the words of pious Rama". "I will co-operate with you to the best of my ability in killing the Rakshasas and conquering Lanka." Was this the 'virtuous' man who had wished the welfare of the Rakshasas and victory for Lanka earlier?

'Devotees of Rama' argue that there is nothing wrong in Vibhishana leaving Ravana, joining Rama and harming Lanka and his own race. They argue that Vibhishana left Ravana because Ravana is wicked. Ravana has been wicked for a long time, abducting others' women. It was already a long time since he had brought Sita. Why had Vibhishana not detested his brother's wickedness earlier as he does now and leave the kingdom? Because the battle has approached and because he has an opportunity to kill his brother, he has joined the enemy camp. Apart from this, Vibhishana has no anger at Ravana for having abducted Sita. Had he been angry, he would not have waited so long after Ravana had brought Sita and would have left the kingdom earlier. ➔

Whispering discussions went on among the Vanara army.

"When Vibhishana came I thought he had come to arrive at a truce and that the battle would stop. See how shamelessly, he says that he will kill the Rakshasas!"

"It is good that Vibhishana has joined us. We will surely win the battle."

"After all of us die…. What is the use?"

"Of course, you are right…. This wicked fellow has come here abandoning his brother."

"In the matter of property they don't care whether it is an elder brother or younger brother. We should not speak loudly…. Didn't our king do the same? He had his brother killed. Moreover, as if he were a very good man, he is wondering how Vibhishana has left his brother. Whoever comes to power is a great man! Like our king, Vibhishana too has determined to kill the brother. If one is sure of getting property, a younger brother will kill the elder brother and the elder brother will kill the younger one. A father will kill the son and the son will kill the father. Who does not know all this drama? Outwardly, they talk of justice, virtue, love, friendship. Everything is for the sake of property, you know."

Looking at Lakshmana *serene*ly, Rama ordered, "Lakshmana! Sprinkle sea water over Vibhishana."

With great enthusiasm, Lakshmana brought water from the sea, sprinkled it on the head of Vibhishana and said, "You will get the power over the kingdom of Lanka!"

Rama rose up with a smile. "Vibhishana! Hereafter you are the head of Lanka! The kingdom of Lanka is yours!" He embraced Vibhishana.

"Your pleasure, my lord!" Vibhishana slid from Rama's arms to his feet.

Unable to watch the scene of Rama embracing Vibhishana, Sugriva turned away his face toward the sea.

'All these days, I have been helpful to Rama. I was the lone friend. Now, Vibhishana is more important than I am. Vibhishana alone is a friend. Will Rama remember me hereafter?'

"Your Excellency!... Your Excellency!.... Another fellow has come. Another Rakshasa has come….", some Vanaras came running. "He says Ravana has sent him. He wants to talk to you." The Vanaras crowded round Sugriva enthusiastically.

Frowning with fear, Sugriva — "Hold him tight… What work has he with me?.... Has Ravana sent him? Have you heard properly?.... Why do you bring him to me?.... Drag him to me…. Be careful! He may escape!" While Sugriva was saying so, some soldiers brought the newcomer joyfully.

That man also shone with good ornaments and had decorated himself like Vibhishana and his ministers.

As soon as he came, he enquired who Sugriva was and bowed to him. "King Sugriva! My name is Suka. I have come from Lanka. King Ravana has sent me to you. He has asked me to *tell you some words as his words*. If you permit me…." He paused obediently.

Rama glanced sideways at Suka with surprise.

Vibhishana slowly turned away into the

➔ What should Rama remember first as soon as he heard that Vibhishana had come from Lanka? He must remember Sita. He should have asked about the welfare of Sita. Although he did not ask at the beginning, did he ask even at the end? Even after enquiring about the strength of Lanka and its politics, did he ask even in passing, 'How is Sita? Do you know any thing about her?' Where was that memory? ★

crowd.

Sugriva looked from side to side with surprise and said, "All right! Tell me! What are those words?" He tightened his lips.

Saluting again, Suka started. "Your Excellency! I will tell you the words which my king has asked me to tell you. — 'Sugriva! You are like my brother. Why do you have enmity with me? What is your loss if I have brought Rama's wife? You are a great warrior. A valorous man. What need do you have to join Rama? Why do you unnecessarily destroy your armies in this battle? Don't act foolishly. The Vanaras can in no way attack Lanka. Take back your armies to Kishkindha and live happily!' — This is how our king has asked me to tell you." After saying so, Suka remained silent.

Every body's *looks fell on the face of* Sugriva.

Lowering his head, Rama *serenely* looked down.

Not clear as to what do, Sugriva looked at the faces of his ministers irritably.

Not clear about what to do, they also looked at the face of the king.

Sugriva looked at Rama as if asking him, "What do you want me to say?"

With half closed eyes, that gentleman was lost in *serenity*.

It had been irritating for Sugriva since Rama had embraced Vibhishana. He was very eager to tell Rama, "See, what a good friend I am!" It is better if I tell Ravana's messenger the words, which Rama likes!

"King Sugriva! Command me what to tell Ravana.....", said Suka obediently.

Sugriva frowned angrily. "Why should your king send me a message as if he were a friend of mine? Listen properly to what I say and tell the same to your king. — 'Ravana! Have you ever helped me? It was Rama who did. Rama is my friend. As you are the enemy of my friend, you are my enemy...." While talking this to Suka, Sugriva looked at Rama intermittently as if asking Rama, "Do you hear what I am saying?" Observing Rama's joy, Sugriva enthusiastically began to talk angrily to Suka. 'Ravana! You say that I am your brother. Yet we have to kill you like Vali since you are a wicked man. Rama is a great warrior. Don't think he will let you scot free. We will surely attack Lanka. We will see your end.' — Suka! Tell him that I said this. Understand? Now you go off!" He rebuked Suka and looked toward Rama with a smiling face.

Sugriva himself was surprised how many words had come out of his mouth and how boldly he had spoken!

"Yes sir!" Suka turned back.

"Ah what a great message he had brought! They want us to give up the idea of the battle!" said some fanatic of battle.

"In fact, is this fellow a messenger or not? I don't have any confidence. He might have come to find out our secrets", said Angada.

Sugriva shouted hurriedly. "Then, catch him, catch him! Don't leave him! Tie him up!" By then some heroes among heroes, had already enthusiastically finished kicking, hitting, clawing, pulling off clothes and jewels, twisting his arms and legs. They *hurled whatever abuses came to their mouths.*

Unable to bear the suffering, Suka cried out loudly. "Alas! I am not a spy. Believe me. I came because the king sent me as a messenger. I told you whatever my king had asked me to tell you. I have not fabricated anything.... Alas! These people are removing my eyeballs. They are breaking my hands. Sirs! I salute you. Please spare me. Alas! To whom should I appeal?"[368]

Vibhishana, who had rescued Hanuman by preaching royal sermons that a king must not torture a messenger simply stood there without uttering a single word in Suka's defence!

Hearing Suka's cries, Rama said *serene*ly, "Don't torture him." He said this and again remained silent.

By then all kinds of torture was over and the enthusiasm of the Vanaras had diminished to a great extent.

After *hearing* the cries of Suka *happily*, Sugriva frowned and said, "All right! Don't do anything to that fellow. Tie his feet, hands, mouth and everything and keep him aside….Be careful! He may try to escape…Tightly….." He passed an order and turned towards Rama with a smiling face. ★

[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

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368. Yuddhȧ kanda, sarga 20, slokas 32 to 36: Suka came as a messenger. What did they do to a man who came as a messenger? "Later, on the orders of Sugriva, Vanaras caught Suka who flew into the sky and crying like an orphan and tied him up. When the efficient Vanaras caught and tortured him a lot, Suka called Rama loudly, the great man, and cried. "Rama! These people are cutting my arms and hitting my eyes!"

As it would not look nice if Rama had ordered the Vanaras to catch Suka, the poet put the blame on Sugriva. He depicted as if Sugriva himself had ordered them. Sugriva was also a great politician, wasn't it? A great man of justice, wasn't he? Is he a fool who does not know how to act in the case of a messenger. Has Suka done any of the wicked acts, which Hanuman did in Lanka? Then why punish him? Why shouldn't the poet write as if Vanaras did not catch Suka and let him off? It is the poet's wish to thrash Suka since he was the messenger of the Rakshasas! And the Vanaras (the mob of monkeys) are ready to bear the blame, aren't they? He made Sugriva (not Rama) order to catch Suka and thrash him until his (poet's) grudge was satisfied.

If the question, 'Is it not wrong to hit the messenger arises', the poet will answer thus, 'It is Sugriva who had it done. He is a Vanara, isn't he? What does that fellow know? If it were Rama, would he have had such thing done? Moreover he had rescued Suka!' It does not matter even if Sugriva is blamed, it is enough if Rama is not blamed. Moreover, the reputation of Rama was that he had rescued Suka!

Suka was a loyal messenger. He had acted totally in accordance with the wishes of his king. He had come to tell Sugriva. Will such a person praise Rama? Does he think Rama is a virtuous and pious man? Making even enemies praise Rama! The poet does not care how a given character ought to speak in what manner! He does not care even if he gets an idea about it. Not satisfied with his own sycophancy and that of the sages for Rama, he turns the enemies too into sycophants of Rama. He has depicted that Sugriva tied Suka up out of stupidity and Sri Rama had him released out of his sense of justice! — Thus the poet *gathered a basketful of fame* for Rama. The poet maligns anybody in order to bring fame for Rama. It could be Lakshmana, Bharata or Sugriva!

On the one hand, he receives help from Sugriva and on the other hand ridicules him! Except slavery to Rama, the poet has no morality! ★

Link-8

Between the 12th Story and the 13th Story

[The **12th** story ends when Vibhishana leaves his brother and joins Rama's camp. The **13th** story begins with Ravana's observation of enemy armies. This is the link between those two stories.]

Seeing Vibhishana with a smiling face, Sugriva said, "Vibhishana! How can we cross this sea with this Vanara army? I can't think of a way. (*It seems Sugriva realised that Rama did not get ides. So, hereafter, these people will pester Vibhishana for every thing. Pity, this man came there without knowing these people!*)[369]

Thinking for a while, Vibhishana said, "The sons of Sagara, who belonged to the Ikshvaku dynasty, had dug this entire sea. (*This means, there were no seas before Sagara gave birth to children!*) Since Rama also belongs to Ikshvaku dynasty, Samudra, the god of sea, ought to help Rama with a sense of gratitude. Will *Samudra*, the god of the sea, not help if Rama seeks refuge in him?"[370]

Sugriva passed on Vibhishana's idea to Rama with enthusiasm. Sri Rama, a man with great wisdom, liked Vibhishana's idea. (*It seems, great wisdom always looks forward to others' ideas!*)

Rama looked at Lakshmana and Sugriva with a smile. "Lakshmana! Vibhishana's idea is good. Now tell me what Sugriva and you think about it. Sugriva is a great pundit! You can also think well. Both of you think and tell what will be a better idea! (*I am asking you casually. Any way I will dismiss what you suggest!*)"

Lakshmana and Sugriva said in one voice. "We like what Vibhishana has said. (*Who will think about it again?*) We have to pray to Samudra and try to build a bridge. Without a bridge, even gods cannot go to Lanka. (*This means, the flying of Hanuman and flying of Vibhishana are utter lies!*) We are running short of time. Why delay further? Pray to Samudra", they hurried Rama.

Lakshmana quickly dumped sacred grass on the edge of the sea. Immediately, Rama went closer to the sea *serene*ly, spread some sacred grass (*throwing some grass*), turned to the east and saluted. "Now I have only one way out; crossing the sea or death. Saying so, Rama lay down keeping his right hand beneath his head.

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369. Yuddha kanda, sarga 19, slokas 29 & 30:

Hanuman and Sugriva are asking for an idea how to cross the sea. "Vibhishana! How can we — along with the Vanara army which has extraordinary might — cross this sea? We do not have any idea of how to do this." So, Vibhishana has to give ideas as to how to cross the sea. Vibhishana's help in Rama's camp has already begun! ★

370. One person helping another, the recipient of the help showing his gratitude to the person who had helped him — This is something that happens in human society. We can observe aspects of society in the stories of gods, birds and animals. The stories of gods do not emerge from elsewhere. All the stories of gods have been created by human beings. These stories had not been in existence before human beings. ★

(*What sort of prayer is this?*)[371] That hand had many kinds of ornaments. (*This is a sweet memory fourteen years ago!*) Many noble women used to decorate it.[372]

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371. Yuddha kanda, sarga 21, sloka 8:

There is some controversy about the meaning of this sloka.

Lying down near the sea, Rama uttered the following words: *adyamee maraNamvaadha taraNam saagarasyavaa. Adya* = today; *mee* = to me; *maraNamvaa* = either death; *adha* = or; *saagarasya* = of the sea; *taraNamvaa* = or crossing. This means, Rama thought, "Today, I should either cross the sea or die". But many translators are not giving this interpretation for this sloka. If Rama thought, "I will die if I cannot cross the sea", the pundits might have felt insulted *as if some one had beheaded them*. Hence, they gave a different interpretation. They translated as if Rama thought, "I will either cross the sea or destroy it".

For the expression, "crossing of the sea or my death", they gave the meaning, "crossing of the sea or death of the sea." They are attributing 'death' to the sea. How can a man, who cannot cross the ocean, destroy the sea? Can't a man who can destroy the sea cross it? Therefore, it is correct to interpret that Rama thought, "Crossing the sea or die."

But pundits think, "Will it be appropriate if Rama thought so?" Why should they think it inappropriate? In fact, what is appropriate in the whole text? Many a time, Rama said, "I will die."

Generally, human beings, when they attempt to do difficult jobs, say, "I will either achieve this or give up my life." However much the poet describes Rama as a god, this character behaves like a human being since the poet is a human being and Rama is a character, which that poet has created. The poet does not know how to behave like a god instead of a human being. He does not know because such things do not exist. God is a creation of human beings. Since there is no god, god's words and god's behaviour do not exist. 'Where does god live? How does he behave? How does he talk? What are his problems? Does he face hardships? What is the nature of those hardships? How will they be solved?' — All these things are but the imagination of human beings. Human beings create things based on their knowledge of society. Hence, the character of gods, which poets (other human beings) create, act like human beings. The poet does not know how to behave differently (like a god). Hence Rama always behaves like a human being. (like a hypocritical human being!) ★

372. Yuddha kanda, sarga 21, sloka 3: This is another context in which one can discuss the question whether Rama had wives other than Sita. That's why we have to examine this point in detail. Concerning noble women decorating Rama's hand, the poet said as follows:

"……………………………………

bhujai parama naariiNaam abhi mruSTam aneekadhaa"

parama naariiNaam = of noble women; bhujai = by hands; aneekadhaa = in several ways; abhimruSTam: See the following explanation to this word. (mruj = to wipe, to rub, to clean or to embellish). 'mruSTa' is the past tense form of 'mruj'. It means, 'wiped, rubbed, cleaned or embellished'. mruSTam = wiped by, rubbed by, cleaned by, embellished by. 'abhi' is a prefix and it has no specific meaning. This does not occur in isolation. It always accompanies another word. It intensifies the meaning as in 'vruddhi' and 'abhi vruddhi'; mruSTam = abhimruSTam 'wiped more than once by; rubbed more than once by; cleaned more than once by; embellished more than once by' and so on.

Regarding this, some critics argue: "It is the maid servants who do these services. How does the poet call maidservants 'noble' or 'excellent' women? So, we must assume those women as Rama's wives." Those who hold this argument consider this point most important to refute the argument that Rama is committed to one wife

➔

With fragrant sandal paste that hand looked beautiful. When Sita and Rama slept on the same bed, that hand used to be a pillow for Sita. That hand causes grief to enemies and joy for friends. Rama lay down for three nights with religious fervour keeping such a hand beneath his head. (*So, of the two hands of Rama, the right one is very great!*)

Though Rama lay down with religious devotion, Samudra did not appear before him. (*People of Ikshvaku dynasty might not have dug the sea!*)

Rama became furious. His eyes turned red. "Lakshmana! Have you noticed? Samudra has not appeared. How arrogant he is! We should not tolerate people without character. The world worships arrogant, wicked and people who boast. (*Therefore, I too behave like them and receive worship.*) There is no use of behaving calmly and delicately. Patience does not bring fame. Now, see, I will upset the sea with the blows of my arrows. See, the sea will be filled with crocodiles, serpents and fish broken into pieces. (*Lakshmana will see. Why will he not see? Well, shoot arrows!*) See, I will dry up the entire water in the sea by great battle. (*Wage battle, we too will watch it!*) Then all the Vanaras will go to Lanka walking. Seeing my patience, Samudra is thinking that I am an inefficient person. Should I show mercy to such a wicked fellow? So far, he has not appeared before me because of my goodness. Now it is no use.[373]

Where are my bows and arrows? Get them. I am becoming furious. I will not pardon him. I will torture Samudra so much that he might

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➔ The argument of another side is as follows: All these decorations were done to Rama's hand in the past. (*The poet used the word 'puraa'*). 'Past' means, it might be in Rama's childhood. Rama's mother and his step-mothers might have — with great love and fondness — applied oil to his body, given him the bath and decorated his hands. There is a possibility of this argument.

In rich families, nowhere do we find mothers nursing or serving their children. Every thing is done by maids only.

Though a king has many wives, do those wives alone bathe the king? Maidservants alone do all that work. Hence, it is enough if we understand why the poet called those maidservants 'noble women'.

It might be the poet's opinion that women who had the fortune of serving and decorating Rama are noble, even if they were maidservants. As they did pious deeds, they had the fortune of serving Sri Rama. Such women are noble in the view of the poet, aren't they?

Whenever the poet wanted to describe a man's relationship with his wives or prostitutes, he has always been describing sexual or devotional aspects only. Almost at every place in the story, whenever he refers to the wife, the poet expresses sexual relationship only. Had he described that 'this hand was embraced, kissed and worshipped by many women', then there would have been some scope to think that 'those women might be his wives.' But, here we have the meanings: "to clean, to embellish'. Therefore, with the help of 'parama naariiNaam' and 'abhi muruSTam', if one argues that Rama had many wives, it is a meaningless argument. A baseless argument. Therefore, this context is not useful for those critics who try to discover Rama's wives. ★

373. When we need some help from others, we ask them in the beginning very politely. If others do not seem to help us, then see our demoniac fury! We don't even think that we have no right to punish them. We don't bother why others did not help: either due to dislike or inability. We don't bother to know what their difficulty is. We expect that they have to help us in no time just because we asked. We don't even think whether we help others when they ask for it. If we don't get help, complaining words, malice, anger, grudge, every thing will continue one after the other.

Rama is behaving exactly like this! First, requests with salutation. Next threatens, "I will do this to you. I will do that. I will see your end. Understand!" ★

never have had such experience before. (*Do something and cross the sea!*) I will see that all the water crosses beyond banks and overflows. (*Then, you will also be washed away!*) Now, I will not keep quiet!" Rama took out the bow and threw arrows into the sea. They went burning brightly and fell into the middle of the sea.

Smoke rose over the entire sea. The waves filled with crocodiles and serpents and rose as high as the Vindhya mountain. Nagas and Rakshasas in the nether world were scared. The entire sea boiled and became disorderly. (*Rama! You have done what you vowed!*) Not satisfied with his anger, Rama is about to throw another arrow, Lakshmana prevented him, "Don't throw! Don't throw!"

Rama said furiously. "Oh Samudra! I will see that you sink to the level of nether world! All your waters will burn, evaporate and diminish. All the living creatures will lose consciousness and die. I will build a bridge with the rain of my arrows and make the Vanaras cross the sea. Do you understand?" Again, he aimed his bow and got ready to throw Brahma's arrow. (*Lakshmana asked him not to throw it. But who will listen him?*)

The earth and sky broke with a great sound. The sun, moon and stars lost their movements. The peaks of mountains fell down like pebbles. The entire world filled with smoke blocking all the directions and paths. Lightening fell from the sky. Bright fire rained. Rivers and lakes became disorderly and upset. All the living creatures cried out of fear. All the living beings lost their consciousness and fainted.

The sea filled with ghosts, serpents and Rakshasas and ran away crossing its shore. (*Poet-sir! All that you have described — how all the worlds turned upside down as soon as Rama lifted his bow — is beautiful.... but I think our readers will not believe it!*)

Seeing Samudra frightened, Rama stood *serene*ly without shooting the arrow.

Just as the sun rose from the Mount Meru, a great man rose from the sea with red garments, garlands and gold ornaments studded with diamonds and precious stones. (*Which goldsmith had made all the jewels of Samudra?*)

Rakshasas, serpents and crocodiles hid behind that great man. Accompanied by those animals, Samudra came obediently to Rama and saluted him. "Rama! The earth, sky, water, air and fire — These are the five spirits (*pancha bhuuta*). These retain their character permanently. It is my nature that I am so deep that it is impossible to cross me. Rama! I should not give up my nature either willingly or due to fear! I will help you as much as I can. Then Rama said, "It is not possible to stop this divine arrow which I have already aimed. Where do you want me to throw it?"

"Rama! I have a place called Drumakulya in the north. That place is famous like you. Some sinners drinking water daily. I am not able to tolerate their touch. (*This means, untouchability was born due to this gentleman.*) Throw your great arrow on those sinners and destroy them", requested Samudra. (*Their sin was — drinking water. This gentleman is not able to bear this!*) Immediately, Rama threw the arrow where had Samudra asked him to throw it. Unable to bear that blow, the earth broke, crying for help. There the entire water that the sinners drank evaporated. Since then, that place has become famous as *Marukantaram* (infertile land).

Thus, Sri Rama destroyed that place so that water is not available to sinners. But he gave a boon, "Samudra! Hereafter there will be adequate cattle fodder in this Marukantaram. Milk, curds and ghee will be plentiful. There will be honey, fruits, bulbs and roots. There will not be any diseases."[374]

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374. Yuddha kanda, sarga 22, slokas 32 to 42: When Rama asked, "Where do you want me to throw this arrow", see how Samudra is confiding his difficulties. "*Dasyas* — who have furious looks and cruelty — are drinking my water." (The word 'Dasyas' has many meanings like: enemies to gods, base, ugly, wicked, outcasts.)

Samudra's words: *paapaaha piibanti salilam mama* = "Sinners are drinking my water". ➔

Samudra felt happy. "Nala, an important person among Vanaras, is the son of Viswakarma. His father gave him a great boon. He can build a bridge over me. (*Then, why hasn't Nala told us about it all these days?*) I will hold the bridge lest it sink in the water. Build the bridge and cross me." Saying so, he disappeared. (*Where does he stay, away from this place?*)

Nala came forward and said, "Rama! It is good that you reprimanded Samudra. In the case of ungrateful people, reprimand is the best way. Until now, I didn't remember that I can build a bridge over Samudra. Now I remember it because Samudra reminded me of it. I am the Aurasaputra of Viswakarma. I am also as great as Viswakarma. (*It is obvious from your face!*) But, I don't remember my strength and ability if none tells me about them." (*We don't know about your ability to build the bridge but* ***you can very well build the forts of lies.***)[375]

➔ The sin that those Dasyas committed is — drinking water belonging to the water of Samudra. Hence, they became his enemies.

Incidents of this sort are totally connected with primitive society. These are but quarrels of primitive people for the sake of 'water ponds'. Samudra could not get back his water pond from the enemy's control. He saw that pond was destroyed and not available to the enemies. Rama did this great deed.

Attempts of one band of people to occupy the lands of another, fights between two bands, destroying good places and water resources without letting enemies use them — All this is primitive tribal social life.

It was an inevitable need of the primitive human beings to fight with the enemies for the sake of cattle fodder, water, fruit trees and their existence. Destroying the enemies without letting them use water was a heroic deed of those times.

"Sri Rama rescued that area, 'marukantara' from the sinners and gave it a boon."

See what sort of boon it is: "Because of the boon of Rama, this Marukantara was like a good place: with good fodder for cattle, without disease, filled with fruits, roots, honey ghee, milk and various kinds of medicines."

The things that the primitive people needed were: fruit trees, water ponds, cattle fodder and safe habitation. Securing all these amounts to a boon. This is why, we have stories about god's boons.

Since 'primitive' society is the beginning stage in the evolution of human society, incidents related to that life gradually transformed into stories in the subsequent period of time. Even after human society passed through the primitive stage, evolved to a higher stage and acquired civilization in the form of construction of houses and cultivation, the specialities of the past society continued as stories.

Many incidents and situations in *Ramayana* reflect the primitive stage. ★

375. Yuddha kanda, sarga 22, sloka 51: 'If Nala knew how to build a bridge, why hasn't he told us all these days?' — This question arises, doesn't it? Therefore, the poet's answer is, "he doesn't remember if none tells him. He could not recall. He forgot.

Suppose Nala remembered at the beginning itself that he could build a bridge over the sea. Then he ought to say, "I can build the bridge, Rama! Don't worry. It is my responsibility to enable you cross the sea," oughtn't he? Then, Rama will appear as some one who cannot cross the ocean and Nala as one who can cross. Will it look nice if Nala appears greater than Rama? The poet has to see that the whole credit goes to Rama.

After Rama threatened, subdued and made Samudra help him with his valour, the credit goes to Rama whether Nala builds it or some other person builds it. ★

"All right! Build the bridge!" Rama commanded.

All the Vanaras went into the forest, uprooted many kinds of trees: *Maddi, Tati, Marri, Maredu, Kobbari, Vepa, Chandra* and many more. They dragged them and began to throw them into the sea. Some Vanaras went up to the mountains, brought elephant-sized boulders with the help of machines. (*Poet-sir! You are not yet in Lanka! You can see machines when you go there. Why the hurry?*)

Some Vanaras held straight bamboos and ropes and took measurements every now and then so that the bridge under construction had no twists and turns.

Thus, all the Vanaras worked only during the day time (The *poet says this because a question arises, 'Is it not dark during the nights?'*) and built a bridge of 14 *yojanas* length on the first day, 20 on the second day, 21 on the third day, 22 on the fourth day and 23 on the fifth day, with a width of 10 yojanas.[376]

The bridge was ready and it touched the Mountain Suvela on the other shore of the sea.

To see that bridge which was *like the parting of the hair on the forehead* of the sea, all the gods gathered in the sky (*What work do the gods have? Always roaming here and there!*)

Sugriva said to Rama, "The sea is very wide. You come by the sky route." (*Will the distance be less if they cross the sea by the sky route?*) Rama climbed on Hanuman and Lakshmana on Angada. (*Hold tightly, Rama!*)[377]

Pushing each other, Vanaras in the sea walked. Some fell, some flew.

All of them crossed the sea due to the mercy of Sri Rama.

All the gods in the sky sprinkled holy waters on Rama and blessed him. "Rama! Destroy all the enemies and rule the entire earth." (*This is the actual point. This whole transaction is meant to occupy the entire earth. The gods have rightly realized. Otherwise, why don't they bless him, 'Live happily with Sita!'*)

After crossing the sea and descending from Hanuman, Rama embraced Lakshmana. (*Perhaps, he was so frightened!*) "Lakshmana! Let us locate a place where fruits and water are available in abundance and position this entire army in Garuda strategy. Bad omens are appearing so that Rakshasas and Vanaras face great ruin. The wind is blowing harshly. The earth is trembling greatly. Mountains are rolling. Huge trees are falling. Clouds are shrieking like eagles. The sky is raining blood. Burning radiantly, a flame of fire is coming out of the sun in leaps. The moon is diminished in his light. The stars have become dim. The earth is being filled with flesh and blood. Let us attack the invincible Lanka."

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[376] Have you noticed how practically they built the bridge? They cut the trees; broke the stones and dragged them with difficulty. They did the usual kind of masonry. They took the correct measurements. They worked only during the daytime. They built the bridge so realistically — that they brought all the things that are necessary to build a bridge and built it as per the procedure, over water for five days to an extent of 800 miles. The bridge was not ready in a single moment with either miracles or chants, you know? It took five days in real time!

Yuddha kanda, sarga 25, slokas 2 & 3:

Ravana was surprised when he heard about the construction of the bridge. "Rama built a bridge which I have never heard of before at any time. I can't believe in any way the fact that he built a bridge across the sea."

The primitive human beings had a big wish of crossing rivers and reaching the locations on the other side of the rivers. It was a routine activity for them to easily cross small streams and channels. It was also usual to cross somewhat wider water ponds by keeping big boulders and trunks of trees horizontally. If we can cross great rivers in the same manner? If we can cross big seas?' In fact, these are necessary. Essential aspects in daily life crop up as intense wishes. Out of anxiety to achieve them, people resort to their imagination. Whatever human beings wanted in the primitive society, the same incidents became part of their stories. Today, whatever we want become incidents in our stories. ★

[377] As these 'links' narrate the story in Valmiki's *Ramayana* as it is, we have to write here as though Rama and Lakshmana sat on Vanaras. But as all the characters are human beings in the stories of *The Poisonous Tree*, Rama and Lakshmana too walk. ★

Vanara warriors are in a tumult. Seeing them, Rama felt excited.[378]

Battle drums are heard from the city of Lanka. Vanaras roared like lions with enthusiasm to fight.

Seeing Lanka, Rama took a deep sigh with grief. "Sita — whose eyes are like that of an antelope — is in this Lanka!" (*Will he begin to express his sexual separation again now?*) Lakshmana! See this Lanka — which was built by Viswakarma — appears to touch the sky near the peaks of Trikuta mountain! (*It was Viswakarma who built Lanka and it was his Aurasaputra Nala who built the bridge over the sea in order to cross the sea and attack Lanka!*) With airplanes flying around the city, Lanka is like a sky filled with clouds. (*We are going to possess this country, of course!*) Gardens everywhere! All of them are so charming filled with flowers, fruits and the chirping of birds! (*We will destroy all this beauty!*) Having drunk the wine, the black bees are intoxicated. Having eaten fruits, birds are fat. (*Having eaten birds, Rama is fat! For every utterance, he recites the poetry of birds!*) Mild winds are blowing pleasantly. Bunches of flowers are swinging charmingly. (*What happened to all the bad omens?*) Then, seeing the Vanaras, Rama ordered, "Angada and Nila must be at the *bosom* of the army. Rishabha on the right side, Gandhamadana on the left, I and Lakshmana at the front, Jambavan and Sushena at the *belly* and Sugriva at the *back*. (*Yes, he likes the back. You too like the same, don't you?*) Rama ordered the army to stand in that manner.

The entire army formed itself in that fashion.

Then Rama said to Sugriva, "The army is ready. Now, let off Suka!"

Sugriva asked his men to let off Suka.[379]

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[Translation: **B. R. Bapuji**]

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378. Yuddha kanda, sarga 23, sloka 16: "Seeing the activities of Vanaras — who possessed courage and valour to please Rama — Rama felt excited." This means, Rama entertained doubts 'whether Vanaras are in a joyous mood or not? Whether they have enthusiasm to fight or not? Rama is happy to see that Vanaras are in favour of the battle. ★

379. Suka came as a messenger from Ravana, didn't he? They tortured him and held him captive. When did they release him? Regarding his release, there are two different references.

Yuddha kanda, sarga 20, sloka 37:

"You should let off the messenger", said Rama.

The question is whether they let him off in this context or not? Had they let him off, he would have flown away, wouldn't he?

Yuddha kanda, sarga 24, slokas 23 & 24:

After the entire Vanara army crossed the sea and reached Lanka, "Then Rama, the man with great lustre said to Sugriva as follows: 'We have divided our troops in a systematic way. Now, let off Suka!" "Having heard Rama's words, Sugriva, a man of great might (*Oh, I see, this man has might sans lustre!*) got Suka released as per the orders of Rama."

They released the messenger now!

They held a messenger — who did not act wickedly — captive for so many days! *Before the very eyes* of Rama!

It was Rama who told them to let off Suka, after they crossed the sea. They held him captive until then on Rama's orders! ★

Story-13

Has Rama Passed Away?

That mansion is white and high like a mountain peak covered with snow.

Surveying the enemy positions through the holes of the upper part of the mansion, Ravana is shocked.

Wherever he looked, he found an unending army. On the edges of the mountain, in the valleys, in the shadows of the trees — everywhere enemy troops appeared in bands. With serene but an agitated mind, Ravana saw enemy forces that exceeded his imagination and expectation.

His attempt to split Rama and Sugriva had failed!

Vibhishana had also joined the enemy camp.

The enemy was ready to besiege Lanka.

The spies who stood around Ravana went on reporting about the enemy forces.[380]

Your Excellency! The enemy troops are large in number. As per your order, we infiltrated and were able to gather some information. It seemed to us that the entire Vanara army is overwhelmed with excitement to fight."

Ravana frowned and asked, "Who are important among them? Who are great warriors? Who are commanders?"

"Nila is the chief commander. We heard him to be a great warrior. Angada excels his father in valour. Nala, Sweta, Kumuda, Rambhu, Sarabha, Pavana, Vinata, Krodha, Dhumra, Pramadhi, Satavali....why so many names, Your Excellency! All commanders are favourable to the battle. Every commander has many troops of soldiers. All those soldiers are very strong. They look like fat jungle elephants."

"Have you observed the attitude of ordinary soldiers?"

The spies looked each other's face for a while. "Your Excellency! You have to think patiently. Their attitude is similar to that of our soldiers..... We came to know that not all of

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380. Yuddha kanda, sarga 24, slokas 25 & 26:

After reaching Lanka, Rama got Suka let off, didn't he? When Suka went to Ravana, Ravana asked him smilingly, (*prasanneeva* = smilingly) 'Have your arms been tied with ropes? It appears that your hands are cut into pieces? Did the Vanaras hold you captive?"

Ravana has no thought, 'Why hasn't my messenger returned yet?' Moreover, the poet says, Ravana asked him smilingly, "Did Vanaras torture you?" It may be pleasing for the poet if Vanaras tortured Suka, but will Ravana smile if the enemies had tortured his messenger? Further, Suka did not tell Ravana about the task for which Ravana sent him to Sugriva. He simply said, "I told the Vanaras whatever you had asked me to tell them." But he did not tell Ravana what Sugriva had said. He began eulogizing Sri Rama. He asked Ravana to give up Sita. To this, Ravana reacted angrily as usual.

Later in **sarga 25:** Ravana called Suka and Sarana and ordered, "Infiltrate into Vanara troops and collect all the secrets." (*We need not think that this Suka is the same as the first one. Even if it is the first Suka, this man is not a messenger but a spy.*)

These Suka and Sarana are spies. Both of them returned along with their retinue and reporting about the enemy troops.

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them were inclined in the beginning. But, we also heard, king Sugriva resorted to compulsion for mobilising the army. Such a large army moved into the battle merely due to the fear for death penalty.... Your Excellency! What is there that you cannot understand? What can a soldier who entered the battlefield do — except exhibiting enthusiasm? He will fight at least for his own protection, won't he? Just as the army of Lanka is cooperating with Lanka's Head, the Kishkindha army......"

Listening impatiently, Ravana turned his eyes toward the enemy troops again.

"Your Excellency! You have to pardon us. We have *carried a bad news* to you and Lanka. Vibhishana did not join the enemy camp selflessly. Rama promised Vibhishana to make him the Head of Lanka, they said...."

Ravana laughed sarcastically. "It will be a matter to be discussed only when he conquers us." Ravana twirled his moustache.

"Not only that, Your Excellency! Vibhishana has also promised to cooperate for the victory of Rama."

Ravana's face turned red with anger. "Is this news correct?"

"Pardon us Your Excellency! Vibhishana's behaviour itself is a proof for our words. Before we had gathered a lot of information, Vibhishana found out our identity. Immediately, all the Vanaras took us to Rama, abusing and kicking.[381] We then gave up hope for our lives.... but...."

Fear for their life suddenly appeared on the faces of spies. "Your Excellency! Forgive us. Listen patiently. That Sri Rama alone gave us the *alms of life*. No king is obliged to show mercy on spies.... But.... that Sea of mercy.... Had he not shown mercy, we do not know in which world we would have been by now! That pious man alone......."

"Stop your nonsense!" Ravana roared with anger. "Are you so happy because you saved your life due to the enemy's mercy? Stop praising that base man and tell me what happened!"

In response to the king's roaring, the spies lowered their heads, trembling. "Forgive us Your Excellency!" they saluted him and resumed humbly. "Your Excellency! We will tell you whatever happened. On seeing us, not only did Rama not exhibit any anger but also conversed with us smilingly. He said, 'O spies! Have you finished the job that your lord had assigned to you? Now go back to your country fearlessly! Tell some words to your king as my words.' He told us some words, Your Lordship!"

"What is that prattle?"

"Ravana! Show all your might in the battle — the might with which you abducted my wife. I am going to attack Lanka tomorrow at dawn. You will see what my valour is in the battle. Exhibit what your valour is.' Tell him these words as I have told you. Now you can go.' Rama talked to us mercifully and had us released, Your Lordship!"[382]

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[381] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 25, sloka 14:** Note what sort of help Vibhishana is giving to Rama: "Vibhishana, a man of great lustre (*perhaps all those who join Rama's camp may acquire lustre!*), saw Suka and Sarana in the disguise of Vanaras, caught them and took them to Rama."★

[382] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 25, slokas 18 to 22:** See Rama's words to Suka and Sarana. "Even though you have seen the entire army, even though you have watched us keenly and even though you have carried out tasks that Vibhishana assigned, you can leave at your will. If you have not seen our troops, you can see them now. Or even Vibhishana can show you our troops."
When enemies came for spying and are caught after they have collected all the secrets, does any sensible man say, "Have you collected all our secrets well? Have you carried out all the tasks that your king has assigned you? If you do not know our secrets well, our men will tell you every thing. Get to know every thing and then leave."

➔

Twirling his moustache, Ravana exhibited serenity and said, "It seems Rama is very hopeful that Ravana might hesitate to fight the battle."

The spies bowed obediently and said, "Your Excellency! Kindly listen to our submission. Save Lanka and drive away our fear. Sri Rama, Sugriva and Vibhishana are very powerful in the enemy camp. Under their auspices, the Vanara army will surely conquer Lanka. Arrive at a truce with Sri Rama and rescue Lanka from the terrible battle. Otherwise, Sri Rama, with his valour……"[383]

Ravana became furious. "What is this prattle? Despite your dependence on my mercy, do you try to do unpleasant things to me? Are you spies who know politics? Have I believed traitors like you as loyal? You deserve the same fate, which Vibhishana, who praised the enemies, met. Ungrateful people like you should not live in my kingdom. All of you leave my kingdom at once. There is no danger to Lanka. Rama who comes to Lanka will not return again. Now go away. Don't show me your faces again." Ravana roared.[384]

➔ Ravana had sent spies in order to collect secrets of the enemies, hadn't he? They came in disguise. If a party does not lose anything if its enemies have gathered its secrets, then how will that information be useful to the enemies?

See, what Rama says further: "You need not worry about your life since Vibhishana has caught you. Unarmed messengers should not be killed." (*The poet used the word 'duutau'*).

Rama does not know the distinction between a spy and a messenger! Are the enemies who came in disguise to gather secrets messengers or emissaries? Only Suka who came earlier was a messenger. The two people who came now are spies and not messengers. (*Even Hanuman was not a messenger when he went to Lanka.*)

One who passes on a message is a messenger.

There is a difference between the activities of messengers and spies. In the case of messengers, kings observe certain rules, namely, that they should not be insulted or killed.

It is the poet's anxiety to say, "Sri Rama is a very noble man, you know! He is a man of justice, you know! He did not have any one killed, you know!" Whenever the poet wanted to gather fame and reputation for Rama, it turns into disrepute or pure stupidity. They tortured Suka and held him captive even though he had come as a messenger and behaved very obediently. They respected those who had come as spies and gathered secret information. Moreover, while seeing them off, they said, "Do you want more secrets? Our people will tell you any number of secrets you want." When they captured the spies who had gathered secrets, they should not let them off and hold them in their custody, shouldn't they? But Sri Rama is sea of mercy. He does not know how a sea of mercy behaves! ★

383. Yuddha kanda, sarga 25, slokas 29 to 34: See how Suka and Sarana are talking to Ravana. "Four noble men (that is Rama, Lakshmana, Sugriva and Vibhishana) are: equal to the guardians of the world, warriors, well versed in archery, valorous and united. These four….. are so capable that they can rout out Lanka along with its fort and place it elsewhere. (*This means, the rest of the army is not necessary!*) If we see the form of Rama and his weapons, he seems to destroy Lanka single-handedly. (*This means the remaining three are also not necessary! If they talk further, the job will be done even without the need of Rama!*) Do not have hostility with Rama. Be peaceful. Present Sita to Rama."

The poet makes spies and messengers of the enemy camp eulogise Rama. ★

384. Yuddha kanda, sarga 29, slokas 5 to 12: It is the intention of the poet to tell how and why it is wrong on the part of the messengers, spies and ministers to oppose the king without being loyal to him. To preach all those political ethics, the poet made Ravana's spies oppose Ravana and used this context to preach those ethics. ➔

All the spies saluted the king obediently and left the place bowing.[385]

Ravana carried on confidential talk with his ministers for a while and then ordered, "I have to go to Asoka vana at once. Make arrangements."

➔ But none in Rama's camp opposed him at any time.

When his spies opposed him, see what Ravana said: "It is not appropriate on the part of those who live under the king to speak words unpleasant to the king, is it? Is it appropriate on your part to eulogize enemies who are waging a battle? You have not understood the essence of the duties of servants as prescribed in science of politics. Although you have acquired a lot of knowledge from the teachers, the essence of the science of politics has not come in your experience. (*You have simply studied things. But you are not using what you have studied.*) I am ruling the kingdom with the help of god and not with the stupid ministers who are ignorant of politics. Are you not afraid of speaking harsh words? The movement of my tongue — which has the power to order — will give you death or protection." (*If you utter a single word, you will die or survive! Kings are so autocratic!*)

Thus, Ravana abused those spies and banished them. These spies who had turned to the enemy camp did not get any imprisonment or death penalty. Because, those who praise Sri Rama must be kept safe and no harm be done to them. If the punishment of exile from the country is given, they can happily and freely leave the country.

See the poet's reasoning as to why he made Ravana banish the spies instead of imposing the death penalty on them.

Ravana says to the spies: "Had my anger not cooled down because of the help you have done for me earlier, I would have killed you for eulogising the enemy camp. I am not inclined to kill you. I remember the help that you have given me in the past. Since these spies had helped him earlier Ravana did not have them killed. This means, Ravana is a very good man, isn't he? But it is not the poet's opinion to make Ravana a good man. However, in order to avoid the death penalty against those spies, he needs some way out. "Since you have helped me a lot, I am not imposing the death penalty on you", says Ravana.

Showing Suka and Sarana as loyal to Ravana! Again, making them praise Rama, as it is a great thing.

Again, the same great thing is dismissed as a very bad thing by reciting political ethics that says how it is contrary to diplomacy to praise the enemies. Also imposing punishment on spies for violating these ethics. Those punishments are easy and comfortable.

How many troubles the poet faces to mobilise public support in favour of Rama's camp! ★

385. Yuddha kanda, sarga 29, slokas 16 to 28 and the whole of sarga 30: After Suka and Sarana left, Ravana again called some spies who were well versed in ethics. "Infiltrate Vanara army. Gather all the secrets. We can comfortably defeat the enemies if we know all their secrets." Ravana sends those spies. The leader of those spies is Saldula.

Vibhishana captures even these spies. (*What sort of spies are they? Stupid spies!*)

Vanaras torture these spies as well. As usual, Sri Rama, the sea of mercy, rescues them.

These spies who are well versed in ethics return to Ravana and begin eulogising Rama. "Sri Rama can easily kill even lions. He is a great warrior. He killed all the Rakshasas in Janasthana. His valour is not small. It is futile to fight with him. You cannot conquer him. Give Sita back to him."

Ravana does not get angry with them. (*They must have done great help to him many a time! Isn't that right, poet-sir?*)

Then he goes to Sita. ★

Ravana stood in front of Sita with smiles. "Sita! On seeing you, my heart is filled with compassion. You have been waiting for a long time for your husband. You innocent woman! Finally all your hopes are shattered", said Ravana, as soon as he saw Sita.

Sita raised her head in fear.

"O beautiful lady! Did you accept me when I told you that I was your husband? How much time you have wasted! How attractive your thighs are!.... At least now, you are obliged to accept me. Your husband is either in heaven or hell by now….."

Sita is shocked! She is trembling!

Ravana laughed leisurely. "Sita! Don't you still believe my words? I am confident that it is my fortune to get you permanently. I will tell you how your husband died. Will you listen? Rama came with the intention to attack Lanka with the Vanara army. But, due to the fatigue of travel the entire Vanara army was immersed in deep sleep…. at midnight, at an opportune moment I sent Prahasta with a huge army against the enemy's army which was sleeping and destroyed it using all the weapons freely….."

Sita listened in shock and disbelief. When she heard that the Vanara army was about to attack, she felt happy that whatever Hanuman said was going to happen. She looked forward to the auspicious hour when she would be free once her husband put his foot in Lanka. In the meantime, this terrible news!

"Prahasta went and cut off Rama's head while he was in deep sleep. He also tried to kill Vibhishana but could not get that wicked man. Lakshmana also escaped. Sugriva's neck has been cut off and he died. Hanuman, who boasted that he would rescue you also *sank in to a deep sleep*. Jambavan has lost his legs and ……."

"Ravana! Don't tell me any more, don't tell me!" Sita shut her ears, crying aloud.

Twirling his moustache, Ravana looked at her with a smile. "Some of the Vanara warriors have died. Some are about to die and moan in the battlefield. Some fled using the *strength of their calves.*

Are you dreaming that your husband will still come and rescue you?.... See what fate that great warrior has met with….." He turned his looks toward his maidservants. "Call Vidyujjihva! He himself brought Rama's head from the battlefield. Call that fellow quickly", Ravana ordered.

Vidyujjihva brought the head of a man in one hand and bow and quiver in another hand, kept them on the ground and bowed to Ravana.

"You fellow! Keep them in front of Sita! Poor lady, she will take a last glance of her husband's face."

Vidyujjihva lifted that head holding the hair and threw it in front of Sita.

Sita looked at that head with grief and fear while all her limbs were trembling, and shed tears profusely and with a bleak disbelief about her husband's death.

The head with the lock of hair of a sage!

Cheeks with dark complexion!

Blood all over the face!

As she observed, Sita's eyes closed.

Ravana looked sideways at Vidyujjihva.

He immediately carried away that head and bow.

Trembling terribly, Sita wailed. 'Ravana! I will immolate myself on the pyre of my husband. Do not separate me from my husband. Sri Rama alone is my husband for any number of births in any number of worlds. While Brahmins were reciting the Vedas, I heard that wives — who show devotion to their husbands — will attain the pious worlds. There is no question of my life without my husband. Ravana! I am not angry with you. You are a noble man. Consider at least this last wish of mine. Make arrangement for the cremation of my husband and me together!"

Ravana stood twirling his moustache and observing Sita amused.

"Victory to the king!", a servant came, stood at a distance and saluted bowing. "Your Excellency! All your ministers are waiting to see you. Give them that honour." He submitted and went away.

Ready to leave, Ravana looked at Sita and said, "O beautiful lady! Why do you still grieve wastefully? Every thing is over. There is no use in feeling sorry any longer. *Make your heart stronger*! Are the hardships that you have faced as Rama's wife not enough? Will you face hardships becoming Rama's wife for several births? Foolish woman! I will no longer forgive you if you do not change your heart, you know! Grief does not suit a woman with a beautiful body like you. Your breasts are creating heat of the cupid (*manmadha taapa*) in me. You have to *float in pleasures* with a man like me who has *great taste for sex*. How can I let you go? Why do you still grieve? I have conquered your husband in the battle. You are obliged to accept me. Your thighs are big and beautiful. Give up grief that Rama has died. Get ready to share my bed. Did you hear all my words? Think about them!" Looking annoyed, he left.

As soon as the king left, the maidservants surrounding Sita went away.

Sita sank in a sea of grief. "Finally, has it happened this way? Have I had to see my husband's death? Even I — who is a great devoted wife — too become a widow? Elders say that it is the fault of the wife if her husband passes away first. I might have committed some fault! How many sins have I committed in my previous birth? I might have committed mistakes while giving charity and donations! The sin I have committed has taken away my husband. My ill luck has enveloped my husband.

There are no indications on my body that cause widowhood? My eyes, my hands, my feet, eye lashes, lips, hair, all my limbs are in accordance with the descriptions in the palmistry! Yet why do I face this misfortune?

My lord! Sri Rama! Brahmins had said you will live long. They said you would become the king and perform hundreds and thousands of sacrifices and religious rituals. They said, I would remain a wife always (*nitya sumangali*). They said I would give birth to great heroic sons. Have the words of all those people turned false? You are a great scholar! You know the sciences that indicate as to how to remove any number of defects in the horoscope. Has death happened to such a scholar like you? Is there any skilled archer who can excel you in this world? You are well versed in the skills of using all kinds of weapons! Such a person like you too faced death?

Rama! I have been depending on you since my girlhood. At the time of taking my hand in the marriage ceremony, you promised in the presence of the *five spirits* that you would never leave me. Have you forgotten?

Have you gone to see all your ancestors?

Are you shining like a star in the sky? Why have you left without taking me with you? If you could not rescue me from captivity of this wicked man, who else can rescue me?

My lord! Are terrible crows and eagles in the battlefield torturing your body — that glittered with good sandal paste, beautiful ornaments and my embraces? Alas! Is your body — which performed many pious acts — deprived of funeral rites? Has any such terrible thing happened in the world?

On seeing Lakshmana who will reach home alone, your mother will die with a broken heart, hearing about your death and my abduction. O Kaika! After a long time your wish is completely fulfilled! You have destroyed completely the Raghu dynasty with your ill mentality.... Can't great men too defy the fruits of the past deeds? [386]

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[386] **Yuddha kanda, entire saga 32:** Sita hears twice about the false news that Rama has died. Once before the battle began and again during the battle. On both the occasions, Sita thinks in the same way and weeps. I have incorporated all those things at a single place in this story. Sita begins with abusing Kaika. "Kaika! Your desire has been fulfilled. You, with your

➔

"*My child* Sita Devi! Please listen to me!", said Sarama, soothing Sita's hair and consoling her.

Sarama is Vibhishana's wife. Ravana had kept Sarama as her guard. Sita trusts Sarama and Trijata.

Glancing maidservants — who were roaming about at a distance — Sarama lowered her voice and whispered, "All that wicked man said is not true. He might have played this trick to deceive you and make you yield to him." Sarama tried to give courage to Sita. "It is not Rama's head that you saw. My spies told me just now that Rama is safe. You must not believe Ravana's words."

Sita looked in wonder as if she couldn't believe Sarama's words.

"Sarama! Is what you said true?"

➔ quarrelsome character, have destroyed the entire Raghu dynasty….. O Rama! People say that death of the husband is the main danger to a woman. Seeing your final stage, I have become a widow. (*The poet used the word 'vidhava'!*) Rama! Brahmins had said that you would live for a long time. The words of Brahmins have turned false. (*This means, Brahmins' words have not turned to be false and they will never turn to be false since Rama did not die!*) Even though you are a man of scholarship and good nature, you have not escaped death. You are in heaven along with the revered ancestors. It is true. (*Perhaps, she has little doubt whether he went to heaven or not*). As a star in space, you are looking. (*This is a belief that great people become stars after their death!*)

Rama married me — who is a *destroyer of the family*. Rama's wife herself turned to be death to him. In my previous birth, I prevented people, who were giving their daughters in marriage. Hence, I am suffering now. (*This is a talk about past deeds and past births!*)

Yuddha kanda, sarga 48, up to sloka 21: "The wise men who said 'that I would beget sons and I would not become a widow' have turned out to be liars. Women who have the marks of a lotus will be consecrated on the throne along with their husbands. I have such lotus marks under my feet. I do not find on my body those features because of which women are unfortunate and are widowed. My locks of hair are fine, of even length and dark. My eyebrows are not joined. My shanks are round and hairless. My teeth are closely set without any cavities. My eyes, eyebrows, hands, feet, ankles and thighs are fleshy. The fingers of my hands and their nails are round and evenly matched. My breasts are large, fully developed and touching each other. (*So far, only men used to describe the breasts of Sita. Now, Sita herself is describing her own breasts. It seems the poet has lost his mind totally. He has no contextual sense at all — as how one character ought to speak or ought not to speak. See further, how Sita speaks about the nipples of her breasts!*) The nipples of my breasts are sunken in (*magna chuchukau* = with nipples that sank). This means, however much women grieve, the poets' eyes will be on their breasts! What baseness! My navel is deep and the surrounding region is elevated while my flanks and bosom are fleshy. My complexion is shining. The hair is soft. My feet touch the ground evenly. But all my good features are a waste. It is not possible to conquer the god." — This is how Sita felt depressed.

(*The cause for her husband's death is the sin, which women commit. Their body marks are the cause. Women are either noble or base depending on their bodily features. None of these features applies to men.*)

Here it is the intention of the poet to tells how women should cry if their husbands die. Further, the poet has described in the subsequent part of the story, how one should lament on various occasions: when wives, brothers or friends pass away!

Rama's grief if Lakshmana passed away; Lakshmana's grief if Rama passes away, Rama's grief over Sugriva, Sugriva's grief over Rama — thus the poet exhibited all their affection in various forms of lamentation.

★

"It is true my child! Have you forgotten that Sri Rama is a great warrior? My innocent child, can a base man like Prahasta kill Rama?"

"Sarama! I am losing the ability to grasp what is true and what is untrue. I can not think anything. Tell me again and again that Rama is safe!"

Frightening war drums are heard from a distance.

The roaring of elephants, neighing of horses, the sounds of chariot wheels — every thing was heard confusingly.

"Are you listening to all that tumult? The army of Rakshasas is ready for a battle. They are keeping horses and elephants ready. They are harnessing the horses to the chariots. The army is marching throughout the city. If Rama had died last night itself and if all the enemies had fled away, why would there be all these preparations? Have you realised at least now, my child! All this is the conspiracy hatched by that wicked man.

"Sarama! Is all what you say true? Do you say that the battle has not yet begun?"

"Alas! Don't you still have confidence in me? I have some maidservants who tell me confidentially, whatever happens in the harem of the king. Whatever Ravana thinks about politics, I will come to know about it. My mother-in-law persuaded Ravana in many ways not to go for the battle. Does this wicked man listen? He is inviting his own ruin. The moment will come quickly when your husband will kill Ravana and embrace you. I *will not fail to see* that both of you meet happily." **387**

Soothing Sita's cheeks, Sarama said with a smile, "Just as the earth looks beautiful with the green fields of the crops, your face will acquire new beauty with the joy of seeing your husband again."

Involuntarily, a smile sprinkled on Sita's face.

The cheeks were still wet. ★

[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

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387. Yuddha kanda, sarga 33, slokas up to 5:

Sarama is Vibhishana's wife, isn't she? Vibhishana has joined the enemy camp, hasn't he? Would Ravana keep Vibhishana's wife as a guard for Sita?

As Sita is grieving, the poet felt that a high-level woman, instead of a maidservant like Trijata must console and give courage to Sita. Vibhishana's wife is favourable to Sita. He could have said, "Sarama met Sita secretly, told her the truth and went away." If Ravana himself had appointed Sarama, would Ravana be a sensible king? Does even a stupid man do that?

Just as Vibhishana was a noble man, Sarama is also a noble woman for the poet. He described Sarama with great respect: that Sarama is soft spoken and she is full of sweet expression. "Then Sarama, who was full of sweet expression, comforted Sita. Then Sita made friends with Sarama — who was ordered by Ravana to guard her, who was compassionate — and who saved Sita by telling her about Rama on various occasions."

Whoever joined Rama's camp, it was enough! They would always be called soft spoken, compassionate and sweet of expression. Their faces also got a glitter as well! ★

Link-9

Between the 13th Story and the 14th Story

[The **13th** story ends with Sarama's consolation of Sita.

The **14th** story begins when Hanuman goes once again to Asoka vana. Between these two stories, the battle took place. It us called ***'Rama-Ravana Yuddham'*** (***Battle between Rama and Ravana***).The entire battle comes in this link.]

Ravana sat in the assembly. The drums, which the Vanaras were beating, and their shouts are heard in the assembly.

Malyavan, who has a kinship relation of a grand father to Ravana, rose from his seat and began a sermon to Ravana. "Your Excellency! A king, who rules as per the science of politics, can rule happily for a long time. He ought to wage a battle against the enemy only when he is strong. When his strength has diminished, he should shrewdly arrive at a truce with the enemy.

Sri Rama is a great valorous man, a man of justice (*dharma*tma). Why do you want to fight with such a man? In the past, Brahma created *dharma* (righteousness) for gods and *adharma* (opposite of *dharma*) for Rakshasas. Therefore, gods have always been on the side of *dharma*.

Owing to your *adharma* activities, your enemies are becoming stronger. Great men are annoyed with you.

As justice is on the side of Rama, all the gods wish for the victory of the gods. (*It seemsVibhishana's group is strong enough in Lanka.*)[388]

Many bad omens appear as an indication that Lanka will face defeat. The clouds are roaring frightfully and raining blood. (*Does that rain of blood not appear to Ravana?*)

Horses and elephants are shedding tears and weeping. (*They are afraid of participation in the battle!*)

The dogs are eating the offerings to the dead ancestors outside the houses. (*The ancestors might have given up the guise of crows and taken up the guise of dogs!*)

Cows are giving birth to donkeys. Rats are playing with mongooses. Cats and tigers, pigs and dogs, Kinneras and Rakshasas live amicably. (*Some Rakshasas were living with Rama, weren't they? This itself is a bad omen!*)

Kala Yama (death) who appears frightening with his black complexion, ugliness and hairless head, is peeping into every body's house. (*Perhaps, he roams about in every body's house, except Ravana's.*)

People have dreams in which dark and ugly women laugh with their teeth exposed, steal from the houses and quarrel among each other. (*Ah, only dreams. Any way, then, we will have our*

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388. Yuddha kanda, sarga 35, slokas 12 to 15:

Some of the words of Malyavan: "Celestial sages, Gandharvas (heavenly musicians) — all wish for Rama's victory. The glorious grand father (Brahma) created *dharma* for gods and *adharma* for Rakshasas. Gods who are good natured resort to dharma and Rakshasas who are wicked resort to adharma" — the person who utters these words is a Rakshasa!

If Brahma himself created adharma for Rakshasas, then what is the need for Rakshasas to follow the path of dharma? Even if they want to follow dharma, how will it be possible? Making Rakshasas say, "Rakshasas are wicked people!" Making them praise gods and Sri Rama! ★

articles secure!)

Flags did not flutter with the former brightness. (*They must have become old and faded and are torn. Then how can they flutter? Get new flags stitched! Don't' you know that much? Then they will flutter beautifully!*)

The sacrificial fire was not aglow even if the mantras (chants) were recited. (*Chants do not burn! Add some dry sticks!*)

Serpents were seen in the kitchens and altar of fire. (*May be they are coming for the warmth! If you watch from where they come and put a hurdle, it is enough!*)

Ants gather around articles of worship like milk, curds (yoghourt) and jaggery. (*Oh! Is it also a bad omen if ants gather around jaggery? In fact, the place of worship is very untidy and clumsy. Then will parrots and black bees gather if not ants and mosquitoes?*)

Horses do not eat grass. The cows go dry. The donkeys shed hair. However well they were treated, they did not become healthy. (*Stupid treatment! Change the doctor!*)

Crows fly in flocks. (*Perhaps, it is the season of preparing Vadiyaalu, small cakes made of black gram flour*).

The frightful screaming of carnivorous wild animals was heard! (*Listen to it if it is heard! What do you lose?*)

Ravana! All these bad omens indicate that the ruin of Lanka is inevitable![389]

Sri Rama is not an ordinary man. He is in fact Vishnu. To the astonishment of the world, he built a bridge across the sea. Why enmity with such a great man? Give away Sita and make truce with Rama!" Thus, Malyavan preached sermons to Ravana with devotion for Rama. (*Ravana! Banish this fellow also!*)

Ravana became furious. "You are pretending as if you wish my good but in reality wish my ruin. Out of jealousy for me, you are talking in favour of the enemy camp. Is Rama — who has lost his kingdom, who is wandering about in forests and who has come for battle relying on a Vanara army — a capable man? Am I — the king of the race of Rakshasas — incapable? Afraid of the enemy, shall I return a woman whom I have got with great effort? Is building a bridge across the sea a great deed? Even gods cannot stand before me! I will annihilate that Rama along with his troops. Even if my head is chopped off, I will not yield to the enemy. Wait and see!"

Malyavan blessed the king and left for home. (*Alas! Doesn't this man get any punishment? Ravana! Are you so foolish?*)

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[389] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 35, slokas 27 to 37:** Observe all these bad omens. People began to consider all those aspects that cause difficulties in daily life as bad omens. Diseases to animals, drying up of cows, burglaries, excessive rains, non-burning of sticks, threat of poisonous insects like snakes and scorpions in the places of shelter, food spoiling, the fear of wild animals — such are bad omens. Those which were favourable to people were good omens. The concept of omens was born out of favourable and adverse situations.

Notice the commonsense in these bad omens. "Animals caught diseases. They are not cured despite numerous kinds of treatments" — this means, people have realised that they catch diseases for some reason and they will be cured if they are treated. This is a logical view. But it becomes bad omen since it is not cured despite treatment. This is something beyond their capacity to overcome the situation.

'Cows give birth to donkeys' — this means, cows give birth to cows is a natural phenomenon. Cows' giving birth to donkeys is not natural. It never occurs. If something happens contrary to nature, it is a bad omen.

Among these bad omens, the poet mentions men and women with dark complexion with a negative attitude and dislike. He mentions that it is an inauspicious omen if men and women of dark complexion cross our path. The dark complexion might be the complexion of the race hostile to the poet's race.

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Later, Ravana made safety arrangements for Lanka. At the east gate — Prahasta. At the south gate — Mahaparshva and Mahodara. In the west — Indrajit. In the north — Suka and Sarana. (*The poet has already forgotten the fact that the king had banished Suka and Sarana.*)

Ravana said he too would come to the north gate. In the middle of the city — Virupaksha. Making arrangements thus, Ravana thought there would be no danger to Lanka.

★ ★

Great warriors Sri Rama, Sugriva, Hanuman and others sat thinking about the tactic of entering Lanka. "How can we enter this Lanka into which even gods cannot enter? We have to think well about it!" While they were thinking so, Vibhishana told them certain things. "My ministers entered Lanka in the guise of birds and have returned just now. Ravana was at the north gate, they said..... Rama! Ravana is a great warrior, you know! Every soldier in Lanka is like Ravana. Do not feel annoyed. I am saying this to make you resolute, not to scare you.[390]

You are a great warrior who can conquer even gods! So how big a task will it be for you to defeat Ravana? (*Those gods — Rama can defeat them and Ravana too can defeat them! Then what useless cowards they are!*)

After hearing what Vibhishana said, Rama told him about his plan. "Nila should attack Prahasta at the east gate. Angada at the south gate. Hanuman is enough to attack Indrajit in the west. Ravana is an utter wicked man. He is causing harm to people of all worlds. Therefore, Lakshmana and I will attack him. (*Do you need assistance?*)

Sugriva, Jambavan and Vibhishana will be in the centre of the troops.

None of the Vanaras should be in the human form. We will be able to recognize who the Vanaras are and who the Rakshasas are only if Vanaras are in the form of Vanaras. (*What will happen if they are in human form? You can recognize who the human beings are and who the Rakshasas are? Well, what if Rakshasas also assume the form of Vanaras?*)[391]

After saying all that, Rama said to Vibhishana, "Ravana is an utter vile fellow. He took away my wife without thinking whether it was right or wrong....(*Ravana did not do that after consulting you but he thought about it for*

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390. Yuddha kanda, sarga 37, slokas 23 & 24: Vibhishana's words: These Rakshasas are akin to wicked Ravana in respect of valour, virility, lustre, courage and arrogance. At this moment, Rama! Do not feel annoyed! I am rousing your wrath. I am not trying to terrify you. You are capable of packing off even gods with your valour."

Since Rama is a great warrior, his enemy too should be a great warrior. Rama had to defeat such a great warrior. Hence, the poet depicts Ravana too as a great warrior.

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391. Yuddha kanda, sarga 37, slokas 34 to 36: In this context, Rama said another thing as follows: "We, the seven of us, will fight in the form of human beings", he said. Who are these seven? First, he mentioned Lakshmana and himself. Why should he specifically say, "Both of us will be in human form"? Can they change into other form? — Then, who are the remaining five?

"*aatmaa pancha maschayam sakhamama vibhiishanaha*". Mama = My; sakha = friend; aatmanaa = by him; panchamaha = the fifth one; ayam = this; vibhiishanascha = Vibhishana.

Vibhishana is the fifth one! Then, who are the other four? We have to assume that they are his ministers.

This means Rama is saying, 'With Vibhishana, they are five people plus Lakshmana and I — the seven of us will be in human form.'

Some translators interpreted this as follows: "Me, Lakshmana, Vibhishana, who is like my fifth brother, Sugriva, Hanuman, Angada, Jambavan — seven of us will be in human form." But, there are no names of Vanaras in Rama's words.

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himself and did it!) He resorted to such an act because of his base mentality of a Rakshasa. I am hesitating that I am compelled to kill all the Rakshasas who are related to a single man. If there is one base fellow in a race, the entire race will be destroyed. Oh! Anger is surging in me if I recall Ravana's name. I cannot tolerate it. (*Perhaps, this is an attempt to make himself resolute!*) I will see once where that wicked man is." Rama rose up and started walking.

All people started. Watching carefully, Lakshmana walked behind Rama.

All people ascended the Suvela mountain.

Lanka appeared. (*Lanka had appeared a while ago. Rama, in fact, had described it. It appeared again. He may describe it again!*) It was night by then. They relaxed that night and at dawn, they saw Lanka.

They saw all the gardens of Lanka. They were vast and beautiful. All the gardens were full of fragrant flowers. All tree had tasty fruit. (*Then, why delay? Conquer it quickly. You can eat them!*) There were mynas, parrots, black bees and cuckoos in the trees. (*What about ants, Rama?*)

Various kinds of water birds in the lakes! The wind had a fragrance!

Throughout Lanka, there were gold mansions, Silver mansions, walls studded with gems, temples, palaces, airplanes. A big mansion with thousand pillars. Machines.

Seeing Lanka, which was a hundred *yojanas* long and thirty yojanas wide, Rama was surprised! Shocked! (*Had he at any time seen the face of another country?*)

★ ★

Ravana sat on the throne at the end of the top of a tower. The maids fanned him with white whisks. They held umbrellas over his head. (*Yes, it is very hot in a tower!*)

Ravana's bosom was full of scars due to the blows of tusks of Airavata, the elephant of Indra, when Ravana had fought Indra.

Applying red sandal paste to his body, Ravana looked like a cloud in the sky on which the evening sunshine fell. He wore garments on which gold flowers were stitched on. He had decorated himself with ornaments studded with diamonds and precious stones. He covered himself with an upper garment of the colour of a hare's blood.

All Vanaras saw Ravana. But Sugriva's anger became boundless. (*Sugriva's anger? How can we believe it?*) With one jump, he reached the top of the tower where Ravana sat. He stood for a moment in front of Ravana. "Do you know who I am? I am Rama's servant as well as friend. Shall I spare you?" Sugriva jumped upward and pushed Ravana's crown down.

Then Ravana got up. "Are you Sugriva? (*Sugriva = good neck*). I will see that you lose your neck." Saying so, Ravana pushed Sugriva and felled him down.

Sugriva sprang up like a ball and flung Ravana down. Ravana got up and flung Sugriva again. (*Oh! What is this flinging all the time? It is boring. Why don't you do something else? Don't you know how to fight?*)

Both of them suddenly pounced on each other. They exchanged blows. They kicked each other. They slapped each other. They shouted at each other. They bit each other. They hit each other. They scratched each other. They pinched each other. They plucked each other's hair. They turned each other. (*Oh! My mother! How well they know to fight! May be Ravana's jewels and Sugriva's jewels got entangled with each other! Why don't they stay at a distance from each other and abuse each other?*)They twisted each other as many ways as possible.[392]

Finally, when Ravana began to use his miraculous strength, Sugriva flew away. (*Ran away!*)

As soon as Sugriva came back, all the Vanaras roared like lions out of joy. (*Because he had returned alive!*)

Rama also felt very happy and embraced Sugriva. "You dared to do so much without

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392. Yuddha kanda, sarga 40, slokas 13 to 16: Those who are interested in wrestling may see these slokas for the wrestling between Ravana and Sugriva. ★

telling me! Kings should never be hasty. (*I was not hasty since I am a king!*) If some danger had befallen you, why do I need Sita? Why Lakshmana? Why Bharata? Why Satrughna? Why should I live? I thought you would not return. Had you not returned, I would have fought the battle and crowned Vibhishana in Lanka and Bharata in Ayodhya and given up my life."

Sugriva felt excited and said with pride, "I know how great my valour is and what my strength is! That's why I went there. When I saw the wicked man that abducted your wife, could I restrain myself? As soon as I saw him, I got angry.[393] (*Though you did not get angry!*)

Appreciating Sugriva, Rama said to Lakshamana, "Lakshmana! Select a place where fruit and water are available, we will plan a strategy. (*How many times do you plan?*) None of the omens is safe. The wind is blowing harshly. The earth is trembling with fear. The peaks of mountains are shaking. (*Alas! It seems his head is reeling!*) Huge trees are falling down. It is raining. There is lightning....(*Thus, the same old description continued here!*) A black dot is appearing on the sun. Stars do not seem as usual. The world is going to be destroyed. We have to start for the battle now itself." Saying so, he descended Suvela mountain and started toward Lanka.The Vanara army and the bear army followed Rama, with lion-like roaring. On hearing their roaring, lions and elephants ran hither and thither.

All the Vanaras routed trees and hills, held them in their hands and jumped up into the sky. Some Vanaras had the strength of ten thousand elephants. Some had the strength of a hundred elephants. Some — of a thousand elephants. Some — of a lakh elephants. Some — of a crore elephants. Some — of a crore of crores elephants! (*There was none who had the strength of fourteen elephants, seventy-six elephants or hundred and thirteen elephants! All had the strength of ten, hundred, thousand, lakh and a crore elephants in accordance with the requirements of poetry!*)

After some time all of them reached Lanka. (*But Hanuman said that even gods couldn't descend Trikuta mountain! All lies!*)

As soon as the Vanaras surrounded Lanka, there was an uproar in the sea as if it was overflowing in the midst of Trikuta mountain. The entire Lanka rocked with sounds.

As per Rama's instructions, all the Vanara commanders went to their respective gates along with a crore of soldiers each.

Keeping thirty-six crores of soldiers around him, Sugriva stood cautiously behind the wall between north gate and the west gate. (*Thirty-six crores of soldiers to stand behind a wall!*)

At the north gate, Ravana was already there with his troops and weapons.

Rama went there along with Lakshmana and the army. There he saw troops, weapons and machines. Consulting Vibhishana, Rama decided to send a messenger to Ravana. (*After seeing all those machines etc, he must have thought truce was better than battle!*)

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393. Yuddha kanda, sarga 41, slokas 2 to 9:

See what Rama says about Sugriva's action. "Without consulting me, you resorted to a bold action. Kings do not do such bold actions. (*Yes, when they have armies who lay down their lives by doing the bold acts, why the hell will the kings risk their lives?*) Hereafter do not do such bold actions. If danger had befallen you, why would I need Sita? What have I to do with my brothers Bharata, Lakshmana and Satrughna? Why do I need my life? Though I knew your valour, before you returned, I resolved that I should kill Ravana in the battle, crown Vibhishana in Lanka, give up the kingdom in favour of Bharata and give up my body (life)"

If Sugriva dies, he too would die, says Rama. How cunning his words were!

See Sugriva's greatness. "Rama! How can I tolerate seeing Ravana, who abducted your wife?" So, Sugriva, you could not control your anger on seeing a man who abducted some body else's wife. Did you not get angry with Vali who owned your wife? Why did you sit on Rishyamuka for such a long time?

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He called Angada. "Angada! You have to go to Ravana as a messenger. I will tell you what you have to say to Ravana. Listen! 'Ravana! Death has approached you. The days of your ruin have approached near. Now you will face the consequences of all your vile acts at my hands. (*Then, will there be a truce?*) If you don't hand over my wife to me and seek refuge at my feet, I will destroy the entire Lanka without letting even a single Rakshasa live. Virtuous Vibhishana sought refuge in me. (*He became virtuous just because he sought refuge in him!*) A sinner like you is not fit for enjoying royal pleasures. I will handover the entire kingdom of Lanka to Vibhishana. You will become pure when you fall prey to my arrows. Even if you turn into a bird and roam around any world, arrows of Rama will not leave you. Perform all the rituals, which you ought to for the sake of other worlds. Look well the whole of your kingdom once. Give up your hopes in every thing and come for battle' — Tell him these words. Don't fear. Go!" said Rama.

Flying like a flame of fire, Angada flew off at once.

Ravana sat in his chambers, holding consultations with his ministers.

Angada descended in front of Ravana. "Ravana! I will say to you what Sri Rama Chandra, the prince of Raghu dynasty, has asked me to tell you. Listen!"

Angada reproduced verbatim what all Rama had said.

Ravana could not control his anger. "Catch this fellow! Butcher him! Kill him!", he shouted.

Four soldiers came forward and caught Angada. Angada yielded to them only in order to show his strength. As soon as the Rakshasas caught him, Angada caught hold of those four Rakshasas with his two hands, jumped above and threw them down, as Ravana watched.

Later he kicked the peak of Ravana's chamber down. "What do you think of Angada?", he shouted and flew away.

Ravana sighed that his ruin was inevitable. (*The poet describes as if Ravana was afraid of the battle right from the beginning. Ravana always sighs, feels worried. He always doubts that he might not win the battle.*)

The Vanara army was still crossing the sea.

Ravana became furious, saw the Vanara armies from the top of his mansions and felt worried a lot.

Rama too felt sad, remembering Sita, who had eyes that resemble those of an antelope's. "Start the battle!", he ordered.

The Vanaras threw with great enthusiasm boulders and trees and filled the trenches. (*Are these trenches, which even gods cannot cross?*) They fell down gates and walls. (*With one sloka, the poet made the Vanaras climb the gates and walls, which even gods could not climb.*) "Victory to Sugriva!.... Victory to Rama and Lakshmana!" shouting thus, the Vanaras forced their way into Lanka.

Some Vanaras engaged in erecting tents for those soldiers who felt tired in the battle. (*They took up this work in order to escape from the menace of the battle!*)

Now, Rama kept a fresh batch of Vanaras again at the four gates.

This time, Kumuda is at the east gate with ten crores of Vanaras. Satavali at the south gate with twenty crores. Vibhishana and Sugriva are at the north gate to help Rama.

On seeing the Vanaras besieging Lanka in this manner, Ravana angrily ordered the army of Rakshasas to fight.

As soon as Ravana ordered them, the army of the Rakshasas enthusiastically combated with the Vanara army.

Fierce battle began. Rakshasas fought with spears, axes, clubs, swords and arrows, the Vanaras with stones and trees.

"Victory to Sri Ramachandra!" were the cries of the Vanaras.

"Victory to Emperor Ravana!" cries of Rakshasas.

Both groups fought each other. Stabbed each other. Tore each other. Cut each other. Killed each other.

"What do you think of Sri Ramachandra? You, Rakshasa rascals! Know that he belongs to the Raghu dynasty!"

"What do you think of Emperor Ravana? You monkey scoundrels! How can the Raghu dynasty stand before the Pulastya dynasty?"

Cries, shouts and abuses from the two sides.

They fought fiercely at every place. They killed each other with one stroke.

The earth was drenched in blood.

Vibhishana and his followers furiously fought with the army of the Rakshasas.

Duels went on at every spot on the battlefield.

Indrajit — with Angada.

Sugriva — with Praghana.

Lakshmana — with Virupaksha.

Vibhishana — with Mitraghuna.

Nala — with Pratapana.

Rama — with Agniketu and Rashmiketu. (*So, Rama was not fighting with Ravana!*)

Hanuman — with Jambumali.

Nila — with Nikumbha.

Sushena — with Vidyunmali.

Two people in pairs thrashing each other. Heads fell to the ground with one stroke. (*Heads of Rakshasas only.*) Horses and elephants collapsed. Chariots broke. Wheels rolled. Shields, swords and clubs broke. Blood flowed in streams. Cries for help and life touched the sky.

The sun set.

Darkness enveloped all sides.

The battle continued.

"Kill!" "Slay!" "Cut his head off!" "Why do you let him go?" "Stab from the back!" "You fellow, stay there! Why do you run away?" – such shouts pierced the darkness from all sides.

Rama's arrows flew across the whole battle field. They annihilated Rakshasas in large numbers. Indrajit hit Angada with a rock-like club. (*First, only Rakshasas hit. People of Rama's camp behaved in a very fair way. Notice this at every point!*) Angada destroyed the chariot, horses and the charioteer of Indrajit.

Indrajit disappeared flying. Sages and gods stood in the sky and *praised* Angada *in thousand voices*. (*It will be nice if Indrajit slaps on their back!*)

Jambumali hit Hanuman with a great weapon on his chest. Hanuman hit the chariot of Jambumali with his palm and destroyed him, his chariot, charioteer and horses. (*When he went to Lanka to search for Sita, Hanuman had killed Jambumali in that battle. Now, again he killed Jambumali*).

Vratapana tortured Nala, hitting him with lightning arrows. Nala pounced on him, removed his eyes and killed him.

Nikumbha hit Nila with arrows and laughed. Nila removed the wheel of the chariot of Nikumbha and hit the horses with it, the charioteers and Nikumbha.

Asaniprabhu shot arrows at Dvividha. Dvividha destroyed the chariot, horses and charioteer of Asaniprabhu.

Mainda pounced upon Vajramusti's chariot and killed its charioteer, its horses and Vajramusti.

Vidyunmali hit Sushena with arrows and roared like a lion. Sushena routed a peak of a big hill threw it on to Vidyunmali's chariot. Vidyunmali skilfully escaped by jumping from the chariot and hit Sushena with a club. Sushena threw another boulder and killed Vidyunmali.

Thus, the battle went on in favour of the Vanaras for a very long time.

Rama ordered ten Vanara commanders to search for Indrajit who had disappeared and asked them to catch.

They went in all directions flying.

Indrajit prevented the Vanaras from advancing in all directions with his arrows and shouted loudly. "Even Devendra cannot catch me. You *monkey-faced fellows*, how can you catch me? Death is approaching Rama and Lakshmana at my hands. Ask them to get ready to fight." Angada shot Naga arrows at Rama and Lakshmana and roared like a lion.

As soon as Indrajit's arrows hit their bodies, great warriors Rama and Lakshmana fell to the ground like trees. The ropes of Naga enveloped their bodies until the end of their nails and began to cause a lot of pain.[394]

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394. If Sri Ramachandra — the incarnation of Sri Maha Vishnu and who has learnt skills of using all kinds of weapons — faints, will it look proper? At the beginning of the battle the fainting of the hero of the story? ★

On seeing Rama fall, Lakshmana gave up hope for his life. He wailed a lot for Rama.

As soon as Rama and Lakshmana fell down, Indrajit gave courage to his armies. "I have killed Rama and Lakshmana. Now, none can save them", he shouted. In that enthusiasm, he thrashed Nila, Hanuman, Jambavan and all those Vanara warriors whoever had come across, with arrows. "I will tell this news to my father", saying so he went into the city joyfully.

Vibhishana consoled Sugriva who sat beside Rama wailing. "There is no danger to Rama's life. The faces of the dead are not radiant. (*To find out whether one is dead or alive, they do not see whether the person is breathing or not. They examine the lustre of their faces!*) If we are lucky, Rama and Lakshmana will surely regain from the faint. (*Then, is there 'good luck'?*) Battles will be like this. It is not certain that any one side will be victorious. (*When you were aware that there is no certainty of victory to any one side, why have you sung the song, "Rama will be victorious!" "Rama will be victorious!"*) Victory and defeat vary. Sugriva! You should be bold and give courage. There is no use in feeling sorry at this moment. There is no fear of death for those who wish truth and justice. (*So, all those who die wish untruth and injustice!*) O Vanaras! Be courageous!" Vibhishana tried to give courage to all Vanaras. But even if a straw moved, the Vanaras were afraid as if Rakshasas had fallen on them and hence they sat around Rama. Indrajit went to his father, saluted him and declared, "I have killed Rama and Lakshmana."

Unable to control his joy, Ravana hugged Indrajit and praised him in many ways.

He tom-tomed to the entire city that Rama and Lakshmana had died. He had the city decorated.

He called Rakshasa women from Asoka vana and ordered, "Tell Sita that Indrajit has killed Rama and Lakshmana! Take Sita in the Pushpak airplane and show her the entire battle field. Now, she will decorate herself and come to me willingly. Take Sita quickly."

The Rakshasa women took the Pushpak airplane to Asoka vana, took Sita in it and took her to the battle field.

On seeing Rama and Lakshmana fainted, the Vanaras wailed and the Rakshasas rejoiced. Sita began to grieve, "Alas! Do I have widowhood. What sin had I committed? There are no marks on my body that cause misfortune to women? All the prophesies of the Brahmins were untrue. They said I would remain a wife for a long time. They said I would give birth to sons. They said my husband would become a king. They said he would perform Yagnas and yagas. (*Did they not say that he would faint in the battle?*) All the marks of lotus on the limbs of my body have become fruitless! If Sri Rama himself cannot rescue me who else can rescue me? (*All that Sita spoke in the scene in which she weeps seeing Rama from the Pushpak plane has already come in the story. "Has Rama passed away?"*)

Trijata consoled Sita "My child! Rama and Lakshmana have not died. All the Vanaras are bold and unperturbed. (*Whenever crying is needed, the poet says, 'they are crying' and whenever courage is needed, he would say, 'they are courageous'!*) Will they be bold if their king is dead? Even if Mahendra comes, he cannot conquer Rama. (*How is Mahendra able to tolerate all these insults!*) Had Rama and Lakshmana died, this Pushpaka plane would not have allowed you to sit in it. (*Would it have pushed her down? This means, the plane allowed Sita to sit in it out of fear that Rama may return to life and punish it. But if it knows surely that he did not die, then it would have pushed Sita down and returned to Ravana! The poet always tries to* ***raise some logic but falls flat.***)

"Sita! I am telling you this with respect for you since you are a devoted wife! I have never told a lie. I will not tell lies even in the future. (*What more of a lie can there be than this?*) The liveliness on the faces of Rama and Lakshmana has not faded out. They have not died. Believe my words and be bold", Trijata said.

Gathering courage, Sita sighed, "How nice it will be if it is as you have said!"

The Pushpak plane returned to Asoka vana.

★ ★

Sri Rama recovered quickly since he was courageous and valorous. (*Since he knows how quickly one has to recover from a faint! He is always used to this!*)

By the time Rama woke up, Lakshmana was still in a faint.

Then, Rama began to wail (*clung to sorrow*) as per scriptures for his brother. "Alas! Defeated in the battle, my brother is lying on the ground. Now why do I need Sita? Why do I need my life either? If I search the entire globe, I will find Sita but where can I get a brother like Lakshmana who assists me on all occasions? (*This is true! Rama, You have understood well. Who will stand bent before you?*)[395]

Rama's grief continued further as follows: "I will not live any more if Lakshmana dies. I will give up my life. (*Why so much hurry? Why do you always say, "I will give up my life! I will give up my life!" Had you given up your life then itself, what would you give up now? We don't know for whom you will have to give up your life tomorrow. Don't give up! You just talk. All right! Go ahead!*) What shall I tell my mother after going to Ayodhya, without Lakshmana? (*So you will go to Ayodhya? Tell her whatever happened!*) What shall I tell Sumitra? What shall I tell Sita? What shall I tell Kaika? What shall I tell Satrughna? Bharata is a man of fame; what shall I tell him? (*Will you not tell the same thing to all of them? Will you tell differently to each one of them?*)

Lakshmana! You used to always console me. Now, why don't you console me when I am wailing a lot? (*So, Lakshmana has to get up and say, "Brother, don't grieve over the fainting of Lakshmana!*) Lakshmana! So many dangers befell you since you have come to the forests due to me. (*Thank god, you have realised at least this much!*)

However angry I was with you, you have never defied me. You have never uttered even a single word harshly. (*Why should you get angry on such a good man, unless you are arrogant?*) O Vanaras! See, Lakshmana is like the sun throwing his rays — with arrows pierced all over his body! (*The arrows pierced you too, didn't they? You are a great sun!*)

Unable to open his mouth in pain, Lakshmana seemed to express his love through his looks. (*Perhaps, he is saying, "Don't think otherwise because I lay down! Brother, I will*

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395. Yuddha kanda, sarga 49, sloka 6:

Rama's words: "If I search the earth, it is possible to get a woman like Sita. But nowhere will I find a brother like Lakshmana who assists me at all times and who is capable of fighting battles."

Rama is grieving for Lakshmana. This is all right. But why should he mention Sita? Is it appropriate on the part of Rama to say, "If I search on the earth, it is possible to get a woman like Sita." Does Sita say, "It is not impossible that I won't get a man like Rama?" She will not say so since she is a devoted wife. Likewise, should Rama talk about another woman since he has made one-wife vow?

In the story, a scene in which Rama wails for Lakshmana appears once again (**Sarga 102, sloka 13**). Then also, he says, 'one can get wives in any country. One can get relatives. One can't get younger brothers."

If men who do not have vows to one's wife say, "If I lose one wife I will get another wife", it is a different matter. How can a man with a vow to one wife talk like that?

In fact, none knows about vow to one wife in society. It is because it is not in society. It is in the poet's imagination. The poet wanted to show it as an ideal. But he could not imagine that properly. In social life, the only view is, "If a man loses one wife, he can get another wife." This reality is reflected in the poet's description. Ordinary words, which all people in society speak, have come from a man who has taken the vow for one wife.

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bow after I get up!)

Lakshmana! You are a great warrior! If it is Kartaviryarjuna, he can throw five hundred arrows only even though he has a thousand hands. Whereas you can throw more arrows than he with two hands. (*It will be nice if Kartaviryarjuna comes to know that Rama has said this!*) Lakshmana! You are more valorous than Devendra! (*You are praising well. Lakshmana will compensate you. When you fall down this time, he will wail greater than you!*) You are such a great warrior, have you lain down on hard ground? I will give up my life in the presence of these Vanaras. I will not live any longer. You came to the forests along with me. I will go to hell along with you. (*Rama! Lakshmana will not go to hell. As you feel that you have committed wrong, it is right to think that you will go to hell. So, Lakshmana and you cannot go together. Go your own way!*)

Alas! I have told Vibhishana that I will give him the kingdom. My word has turned into a lie!

Sugriva! Take all your army with you and go back to your kingdom! Take Hanuman, Angada, Jambavan and all your ministers and go away quickly! (*You need not say it! If you wait for a while, he will run away!*) Otherwise, Ravana will not let you live after I die. (*Sugriva had a fierce fight with Ravana right in front of your eyes! Have you forgotten?*)

So far, all the Vanara warriors having fought very well. Angada, Hanuman, Jambavan, Nila, Nala and every body (*except me!*) have fought heroically.

What is the use however much they have done? Human beings cannot defy god's decision, can they? (*So, you are a human being!*)

"Sugriva! I am permitting all of you! Go away. (*It will be nice if all people go away!*)

Thus wailing on, Rama concluded his speech.

By then Vibhishana was returning after telling all the soldiers not to fear. On seeing Vibhishana, all the Vanaras began to run thinking he was Indrajit. (*Do Vanaras not know Vibhishana? Do they know only Indrajit?*)

"What is this! Why are all the troops scattering about?" asked Sugriva.

"Rama and Lakshmana fell down. So, all are running with fear."

"Nay! Not for that. Seeing Vibhishana, they think he is Indrajit and are running away", said king Sugriva again.

"Tell all those who are running away. Tell them it is not Indrajit! Tell them to come back!" (*Death penalty to those who do not come back!*)

Then Jambavan went to the fleeing Vanaras, gave them courage and brought them back.

★ ★

Vibhishana came back and saw Rama and Lakshmana had fainted. (*Rama has now fainted again!*) He wiped their eyes with water and began to wail. (*Now, it is the turn of this gentleman!*) "Rakshasas fought a deceitful battle and caused such a plight to Rama and Lakshmana. Indrajit has deceived so much with his base Rakshasa mentality. The persons on whose valour I relied on and wanted to earn a good reputation — they are about to die. My desire for the kingdom is futile. All my hopes turned hopeless. My enemy Ravana has become superior in all ways. He fulfilled his desire to conquer. Also, he fulfilled his vow to destroy the enemies. Now, it is the same whether I am alive or dead. There is no use except facing hardships if I live on."

Sugriva hugged the wailing Vibhishana and gave him courage. "There is no danger to Rama and Lakshmana. If they recover from the faint, they themselves will protect us. You are a virtuous man. You will get Lanka. (*As I am a virtuous man, I got Kishkindha!*) finally, Ravana will perish."[396]

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396. Yuddha kanda, sarga 50, slokas 13 to 21:

Vibhishana's grief: "The virtuous Vibhishana, wiped the eyes of Rama and Lakshmana with a wet hand and said in a loud voice." "I expected to get fame and reputation, relying on the ➔

Then, seeing Sushena, Sugriva said in a loud voice, "Look! Sushena ! After these two brothers get up, take them and all our troops and go back to Kishkindha. I will single-handedly destroy Ravana, his relatives, sons, armies and every body and bring Sita back." (*It seems he has lost his brain out of fear!*)[397]

Then Sushena had an idea. "In the past when battles took place between *Devas* (gods) and *Asuras* (Rakshasas) the Rakshasas who knew arms and weapons in the battle hit gods with weapons. When gods were dying in large numbers, Brihaspati chanted *Mantra Sanjivani* and healed them. Later, gods took creepers of those medicines and kept them on hills called Chandra and Drona in the sea of milk. Some one who can go quickly has to go the sea of milk and bring those medicines. It is better if Hanuman goes there."

Meanwhile the wind blew fiercely. The earth trembled a lot. Huge trees fell down. The sea became turbulent. Coming like a flying flame of fire, Garutmanta appeared to all people.

Serpents, which until then troubled Rama and Lakshmana in the form of arrows, ran away as soon as they saw Garutmanta.

Seeing Rama and Lakshmana, Garuda felt happy and touched their faces with his hands. (*'Hands' means 'feet'?*)

Their pain vanished at once. They got a great glow on their faces. The valour, courage, stability, intelligence, knowledge and memory and other divine features doubled (*What about anger on Kaika?*)

Rama asked Garuda, "We are out of danger due to your grace. Now we are healthy as before. On seeing you, we feel happy as if we have seen our father or grand father. You have beautiful garlands and garments. Who are you?"

"Rama! I am your friend. You will know about my friendship. Having heard (*Who told you?*) that Indrajit had held you captive with snake-arrows (*Naga paasa*), I came to help you. Except me, none can free people from snake-arrows, not even Devendra. (*After you said that you are Rama's friend, it was clear from the way you speak.*)

Rakshasas fight deceitful battles. You should be cautious. You are virtuous. You treat even enemies with affection. You will surely be victorious in the battle. Sparing the aged and children, destroy all the enemies. If you permit me, I will go now!" Garuda hugged Rama and left.[398]

➔ valour of Rama and Lakshmana. Now, they are close to death. Now, I am almost dead, though living. My desire for the kingdom has turned futile. The wish of Ravana is fulfilled." "Hugging Vibhishana — who was wailing in this manner — Sugriva consoled him, "Virtuous man! You will get the kingdom in Lanka. No doubt about it!"

Thus, the poet keeps telling us very clearly, why Vibhishana had joined Rama. He does not conceal this fact, with a view that it was not wrong to join Rama. ★

397. Lakshmana's wailing for Rama and Rama's wailing for Lakshmana, Sugriva's wailing for Rama and Rama's wailing for Sugriva (*asking Sugriva to stop the battle and go away*); Vibhishana's wailing for Rama and Rama's wailing for Vibhishana (*that he could not give him the kingdom of Lanka*); Sita's wailing for Rama and Rama's wailing for Sita; Sugriva consoling Vibhishana and Vibhishana's consoling Sugriva — scenes in this story move with these kinds of 'ideal' love and sacrifice. ★

398. "Rescuing from snake-like arrows" — we have to understand this as: A gentleman called Garuda came, treated, talked in a friendly way and left. This is what happens in reality. Healing a patient is something connected with human society. The hostility between eagles and snakes is something connected with nature. Myths (Mythology) are created on the basis of the realities of nature and society. ★

The Vanara army roared like lions again and were ready for the battle.

★ ★

All people in Lanka heard the shouts of Vanaras.

Ravana is surprised. "Why are the Vanaras so joyous? Go and find out what has happened actually?" He sent some spies. (*He has to look after everything! What do the ministers do? They do not bother about any thing!*)

The spies returned and said, "Rama and Lakshmana are very valorous and are ready for the battle like fat elephants. That's why the Vanaras are happy."

Ravana was surprised again and felt unhappy. "The enemy has become free from the most powerful snake-like arrows. Now, it will be a mistake to think that my strength will secure me victory", he thought. He called Dhumraksha. "Dhumraksha! You have ferocious valour. Take a huge army, go to the battle and kill Rama", he ordered.

Take enough of the army, clubs, swords, spears, axes, staves and many such weapons, Dhumraksha started off for the battle. Some on horses and some on golden chariots drawn by mules started and went to protect the west gate and attack Hanuman.

Birds obstructed Dhumraksha's chariot in the sky (perhaps, all the birds are siding Rama.) Eagles came and sat on the flag.

A bleeding trunk, without a head, came screaming ugly and fell near the chariot of Dhumraksha. Many more bad omens appeared.

All the Rakshasas who had started off for the battle fainted with fear.

Dhrumraksha felt a little worried, later gathered courage and started fighting.

Fierce battle took place again.

The Rakshasas killed the Vanaras.

The Vanaras killed the Rakshasas.

(*We are already familiar with the battle. Rakshasas throw arrows. Vanaras throw trees and boulders. Always the same kind of fighting! The same kind of fighting* ***again and again and again!***)

While the Vanaras killed Rakshasas by hitting, biting, tearing and slapping with trees, rocks, boulders, nails and mouth, the Rakshasas began to flee.

Dhumraksha became furious at the Vanaras and chased them away by *drowning them with the streams of arrows.*

On seeing this, Hanuman brought a big peak of a hill (*It seems all the peaks of hills will be exhausted before the end of the battle!*) and threw it on the chariot of Dhumraksha. Dhumraksha took a thorny club, jumped out of the chariot and gave a nice blow on Hanuman's head. (*How one blow is enough for the head of such a hard fellow?*)

Hanuman brought another boulder and threw it on Dhumraksha.

Dhumraksha fell down and died. (*We know, this happens!*)

Hanuman routed a huge tree, killed the Rakshasa army by thrashing it with the tree.

Those who could escape fled into Lanka.

★ ★

On hearing that Dhumraksha had been is killed, Ravana hissed like a great serpent with anger, called Vajradamshtra and asked him to go to the battle.

Vajradamshtra too started extravagantly. He even took camels along with him. (*Has he worn a few more ornaments?*)

He went to the south gate where Angada was.

Well, as usual, many bad omens appeared. The sunshine diminished. (*If sun shine diminishes, is it a bad omen for Rakshasas?*)

Comets fell from the sky. Birds and animals indicated 'harm to Rakshasas'.

Yet Vajradamshtra gathered courage and marched forward.

Again, the two sides clashed. The battle went on fiercely.

The Rakshasas and the Vanaras fell to the ground with their feet broken, throats cut, chests broken and backs torn. They fell down and *bit the dust.*

With the beats of instruments, sounds of the wheels of the chariot, the screaming of animals and lion-like roaring of warriors, the battle field as like a *violently disturbed sea.*

The Vanara army became ferocious and aused harm to the Rakshasas.

Vajradamshtra pounced upon the Vanara rmy like Yama, the god of death.

Angada burnt like a flame of fire, took up a uge tree and thrashed the Rakshasas as a lion hrashes base animals. As Vajradamshtra was atching, all the Rakshasas perished.

Unable to control his anger, Vajradamshtra *What can you do even if you are angry? Is the oet on your side?*) rained the arrows on anaras. He hit Angada on his vital parts.

Angada brought a huge tree and threw it on ajradamshtra.

Vajradamshtra broke it into pieces with his rrows.

This time, Angada brought a big hill and hrew it on the chariot of Vajradamshtra. Then ajradamshtra (*we know it. He jumped from the hariot skilfully*).....took a big club, jumped rom the chariot and pounced on Angada. (*well one!*)

Angada snatched that club, threw it away, rought a big boulder and threw it on ajradamshtra.

Vajradamshtra fainted, recovered after a hile , took another club, hit Angada with it nd started boxing.

After boxing for a while, Angada took out is sword from the sheath, fought for a while nd finally cut off Vajradamshtra's head.

That head fell down and broke into two ieces. (*The poet's anger is not satisfied even if e cut the head. Some thing more should be one to it.*) The remaining Rakshasas fled into anka.

★ ★

On hearing that Vajradamshtra was killed, avana asked Akampana, a great warrior, to go the battle.

Akampana loved battles. He was capable f combating enemies. He was loyal to the king. one could 'shake'(*kampana*) him. Hence, he as Akampana.

As soon as the king ordered him, Akampana arted off with a huge army. Many bad omens appeared on the way. The horses of the chariots became dull and pathetic. They hesitated to move forward.

Suddenly all people lost courage. The left eye of Akampana fluttered. His face turned pale.

The sky was covered with clouds. Birds and animals screamed indicating harm. Yet Akampana moved forward boldly.

Again, both the sides started a combat. The clouds of dust rose up and covered the entire world. None could see where the other person was. The battle field resounded with screams, shouts and abuses.

Vanaras and Rakshasas fell in heaps. (*All those Vanaras who were dying were common people. None of the important persons died.*)

Pools of blood formed and the entire ground became muddy. The dust sank down.

Not stopping his chariot at any particular place, Akampana was running the chariot all around the battle field, shooting arrows and chasing the Vanara troops. The Vanaras were afraid and hid behind Hanuman. (*Thinking it is of no use if it were behind Rama!*) Akampana showered a rain of arrows on Hanuman.

Hanuman routed a big mountain and chased Akampana. Akampana crushed the hill in the hand of Hanuman into powder with a crescent-shaped arrow. Hanuman again routed an *Ashwakarna* tree and began to thrash the troops of Rakshasas with it. Akampana shot fourteen arrows at Hanuman.

With the arrows pierced into him, Hanuman looked like a mountain with trees; with the bleeding body, he looked like a blossomed Asoka tree and shone like a smokeless piece of fire.

Hanuman got very angry. (*Why angry when he had got so much glitter?*) brought a huge tree and threw it on Akampana.

Akampana died immediately. The remaining Rakshasas also were frightened, lost their consciousness, fell down and died.

The Vanaras heroically thrashed and killed those who had not yet lost their lives.

Those Rakshasas who could escape with their messed up hair and loosened clothing — pushed each other, stamped each other and fled into Lanka.

The gods honoured Hanuman. Rama too honoured.

★ ★

On hearing that Akampana had died, Ravana became furious.

He reviewed his army. He said to Prahasta, "Prahasta! We do not have any other way except battle in order to protect our kingdom. Either me, you, Kumbhan or Indrajit alone must bear this burden. You go to the battle at once. The Vanaras cannot withstand your valour. Rama will definitely be your captive. In case we cannot conquer them, it is better to die. But it is not good to stop the battle and surrender to the enemy. What do you say?"

Prahasta replied obediently. "In any case, it is better to give back Sita. But if you do not intend to give her, shall we stop fighting the battle? All these years you have loved me in many ways. You have honoured me with many gifts. You have helped me in every risky situation. Shall I abandon such a person as you in danger? I will *give up happily* my riches and wealth, my wife and children or even my life for your sake. I will start for the battle now itself", Prahasta made arrangements at once and started with a big army.

The wind blew carrying the fragrance of good sandal wood paste and the fragrance of *ghee* (clarified butter) that spreads when Brahmins pour ghee in the fire and perform worship. All the Rakshasas wore garlands for which magic spells for success had been performed and started off for the battle.

As usual, all the bad omens appeared in the way.

Comets fell. (*May be they are dry ripe leaves!*) The nine planets fell on each other. (*Will it be a loss for Rakshasas if the planets fall on each other.*)

Blood rained and the entire army became wet with blood. As soon as an eagle came and sat on the chariot of Prahasta. The glitter on his face vanished. The whip in the hands of the charioteer of Prahasta fell down. The horses hesitated even while going along an even path.

Just as locusts jump into the fire, Prahasta's troops jumped into the battle. The battle started again.

Sounds of different kinds of weapons dashing against the stones! Runs! Shouts! Abuses! Vows! Cries! Laughs!

Hot blood rained.

The piles of dead bodies increased.

Narantaka, Mahanatha and Samunnata are great Rakshasa warriors.

Tarudu and Jambavan fought with them and killed them by throwing hills at them.

Prahasta dumped arrows angrily on to Vanara troops.

Nila obstructed Prahasta very speedily. He killed the horses by hitting them with Sala trees. He seized the bow from Prahasta's hands and broke it.

Prahasta held a pestle, jumped from the chariot and hit with it on Nila's face.

Nilas's face broke and he threw a big boulder at Prahasta.

Prahasta's head broke, streams of blood flew, and Prahasta fell down and died.

The rest of the Rakshasa troops could not stand in the battle field and left in sorrow.

Sri Rama praised Nila.

★ ★

As he heard about the passing away of Prahasta, anger and grief gripped Ravana at once.

"Now, I can't ignore Rama. I will myself go to the battle field." He started off with a huge army.

On seeing the army that came to the battle field, Rama asked Vibhishana, "Whose is this great army?"

(*The poet has not described any bad omens on the way. Why?*)

Showing all the important persons in the Rakshasa army, Vibhishana said, "Look! That person who is shining like a young-sun over that elephant! He is Akampana. Over there on that chariot. The man who is twisting the bow like Indra…. with a little bit of sharp teeth…. that flag with the lion's picture….? He is Indrajit. That long fellow is Atikaya. Look! The one who is making noise like a donkey! He is Mahodara. (*"Look here! The one who stood like a dog, he is Vibhishana!*) The one who is on the horse this side is Pisacha. The one on the bull is Trisirassu. See the flag with the picture of the king of serpents, he is Kumbha!" Thus, describing every body, Vibhishana said, "Look, over there! There are fellows with tiger-faces, camel-faces, elephant-faces! The one who is in their midst is Ravana! See, he is shining like Rudra and Indra.

(*Rama had seen Ravana before — when Sugriva pounced upon Ravana. Yet, he talks as if he is seeing him for the first time.*)

Rama looked in surprise. "Ravana is very valorous. He is glittering like the sun which we cannot see with our eyes. Even gods do not have so much shine. It is very amazing! (*Then, what do you think? Do you think that the entire glitter is **your father's property**?*) By the grace of god, this wicked fellow has come to my view. I will satisfy all my anger now", thinking so, Rama kept his bow ready and stood for the battle along with Lakshmana. (*It seems the poet is afraid of sending Rama alone against Ravana. Rama does not take even a single step without Lakshmana!*)

Ravana said to his troops, "All of you go back to Lanka. If the Vanaras come to know that I am not there, they will spoil the whole Lanka. You go and protect Lanka."

The entire army of Ravana went back. Like a big fish struggling in the sea, Ravana pounced upon the Vanara army.[399]

Sugriva uprooted a mountain filled with huge trees and jumped on to Ravana.

Ravana crushed that mountain into powder and hit Sugriva with arrows akin to a thunderbolt (*Vajrayudha*)

Sugriva fainted. (*Will Rama begin wailing as per the scriptures?*)

As Ravana was scattering the Vanara army, the Vanaras could not withstand and sought Rama's protection. (*Nay, it is of no use to go to Sri Rama. Run to Hanuman!*)

Sri Rama, who is the sea of mercy, moved to the battle field with a great bow.

Lakshmana saluted Rama and prayed, "O great lord! You alone are capable of killing this wicked man. But, why should a great man like you come to kill this base fellow? I will kill him. (*I am also capable!*) Permit me!"

Rama agreed at once. ('*Thank god! I am saved!*') "Go ahead!" Then he gave some sermons. "You should be very careful! Ravana is a great valorous man. (*Lakshmana! Tickle Ravana. Keep him in good humour so that he will not get angry and then fight with him!*) Find out his weakness! Take care not to reveal your weakness!" (*He too will be careful. He too has read those scriptures that you have read. Is it Viswamitra who taught you such stupid things?*)

After bowing to Rama, Lakshmana started off. (*The poet is not yet making Rama enter the arena. Think why?*)

In the meantime, Hanuman went to Ravana's chariot raised his hand and shouted.

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399. Yuddha kanda, sarga 59, slokas 33 to 35: Ravana first started with his troops. After coming to the battle ground, he sent back his troops asking them, "Protect Lanka!" He entered the battle alone! It seems this guy has really *lost his brain.*

Very great heroes in Ravana's camp died. It would not look proper if Ravana did not go to the battle. Therefore, Ravana had to go to the battle field. But he can not die yet. If Ravana dies now, all the 'fascinating' things will cease. Hence, Ravana has to face defeat and return humiliated but not die. It is the poet's view that his troops should not be present if Ravana has to face the defeat. (*Who will refute if the poet says that Ravana faced defeat in spite of the presence of troops? Can the troops withstand Sri Ramachandra?*) As the absence of troops is better than their presence, the poet has to ensure that the troops were absent. For this, a pretext were needed. If these troops were not there in Lanka, the Vanaras will spoil Lanka! Why should Ravana first bring the troops and then ask them to return? The poet describes Ravana in such a way that we feel, "How foolish Ravana is!" But by saying so, the poet is proving himself a fool.

★

"Ravana! You have no death at the hands of the gods. But death has approached you through the Vanaras. (*Not due to Vanaras. Due to humans! Hanuman, don't grab the fame of killing Ravana!*)

"Look here! I will take away your life with this hand", Hanuman threatened.

"Come on! Hit me however strong you may be! I will see what your strength is?" Ravana stood carelessly.

"I killed your son earlier. Do you remember or not?"

Ravana became furious and hit Hanuman on his chest with this fist. Hanuman was shocked, recovered and he too hit Ravana on his chest. With that blow, Ravana shook like a big hill.

Sages and gods in the sky praised Hanuman a lot. (*Why do they sit there and simply praise? Why don't they come down and lend a hand?*)

Ravana also praised Hanuman. "Though you are my enemy, you deserve appreciation! You are a *great* valorous man!

"What valour do I have? I could kill you with one blow. Is this also valour? Hit me this time, then you will see my real valour.

Ravana angrily hit Hanuman again on his chest.

Hanuman fainted. (*Oh, I see, this is his real valour!*)

Then Ravana rushed towards Nila and rained arrows on him one after the other continuously.

Nila threw a big mountain. (*Have the mountains not yet been exhausted?*)

Meanwhile, Hanuman recovered from the faint and saw Ravana. "I am keeping quiet because you are fighting with another person.... otherwise...." slapping his own thighs, Hanuman challenged him.

Ignoring Hanuman, Ravana immersed himself in breaking into pieces the trees and mountains, which Nila was throwing at him. (*Yes, one should do his own job!*)

Nila made his body as small as a finger and climbed the pole of the flag on his chariot. From there he jumped from the tip of Ravana's bow to the top of his crown. (*Only Vanaras do all these odd things. Rakshasas do not do them even if they can. We don't know, why!*)

On seeing Nala's leaping, all the Vanaras, unable to control their joy, shouted ridiculing Ravana.

Ravana was startled and stood for a while as he had no idea what to do. Later, he got ready to throw *Aagneeya* arrow. "You are a very skilled man. Take this blow and save your life", saying so to Nila, Ravana shot an arrow.

Nila fainted (*what a wonderful thing has happened to you, Nila!*) But, as he fell on his knees due to the miraculous power of his father, Nila has not lost his life. (*Poet, You may belong to Rama's camp. But, this partiality is too much! Readers will grasp your partiality. It is up to you to take a stand!*)

On seeing it Nila fainted, Ravana diverted his chariot to another side.

Coming in Ravana's way, Lakshmana said to Ravana, "O Rakshasa king! Why do you fight with Vanaras? Fight with me!" (*This gentleman and his brother are more valorous than Vanaras! They would have had no other alternative if the Vanaras had not been there to help them. Yet, these fellows have a contemptuous attitude towards the Vanaras!*)

"Oh, I see! You are Lakshmana? Now I can see. Be ready for your journey to Yama's world! Now see the miracle of my arrows", said Ravana.

Lakshmana laughed. "Great people never praise themselves. (*Your brother does the same thing whenever he opens his mouth. In fact, he opens his mouth only to praise himself. This means your brother is not a great man! Well said, Lakshmana!*) You are praising yourself! I too have seen your valour! Come on!"

Ravana angrily shot seven arrows. (*This is poetry calculation!*)

Lakshmana broke them into pieces. (*We know!*)

Between the two, a fight of arrows took place for a while.

Finally Lakshmana broke Ravana's bow.

Ravana hit Lakshmana with a weapon called 'Shakti'.

As soon as Shakti hit him, Lakshmana meditated on Sri Maha Vishnu. But fainted. (*Has

'Sri Mahavishnu' not worked?)

Ravana tried to lift Lakshmana to take him along with him. But could not lift him.

One may lift great mountains and the three worlds filled with great seas but it is not possible for any one to lift Lakshmana in the battle field!

Meanwhile Hanuman came running and hit him on the chest. (*Oh, what a rude fellow this Hanuman is! He does not at all think about how painful it is to others.*)

Vomiting blood, Ravana fell to the ground. (*bhuumau* = on the ground).

Ravana was shocked and fell in the chariot. (*radhoopasthee =In the centre of the chariot. In one sloka, he fell on the ground. In the next sloka, he fell in the chariot. We do not know on what work the poet got up after finishing the first sloka. By the time he returned and sat to write, he forgot where Ravana fell down!*)

Though he regained consciousness, Ravana could not dare to attack as he had previously. (*Oh! Ravana! Why these battles? Why do you '**eat**' blows of Hanuman? Send back Sita!*)

The sages and gods felt very happy that Ravana had lost his strength. (*It seems these fellows have the same job!*)

Meanwhile Hanuman lifted Lakshmana and laid down near Rama. (*Is it not surprising? Did the poet not say that none could lift Lakshmana in the battle field, didn't he? But he forgot to put forward a point — 'only enemies cannot lift him; friends can!' — that would shut the mouths of foolish critics.*)

The Shakti, which Ravana had thrown, left from the body of Lakshmana. By then Ravana gathered courage and took up the bow again.

On seeing Ravana getting up, the Vanaras were afraid and began to run away.

Chasing Ravana's chariot, Rama began to run. (*Now, Rama came in front of Ravana.*)

Hanuman said to Rama, "Rama! Just as Sri Maha Vishnu sat on the back of Garuda, you sit on my back." (*Come on! Climb up! Why delay?*)

At once, Rama sat on Hanuman. Hanuman carried Rama to Ravana.

Rama shouted at Ravana, "Rakshasa! Stop! I will not leave you now. Even if you roam any number of worlds, you cannot escape me. What do you think of me? It was I who killed fourteen thousand Rakshasas in Janasthana! (*It is the only sweet memory for the entire life, it seems!*) Now I will satisfy all my anger."

Meanwhile, Ravana shot at Hanuman an arrow that was like deadly fire. (*Hanuman may throw Rama down in order to combat with Ravana!*)

The strength and lustre of Hanuman, who is originally strong, increased after that arrow hit him. (*So, the more he receives blows of arrows the better it is!*)

Rama got angry (*Is it because Hanuman's strength increased?*) and broke Ravana's chariot by throwing many arrows. He hit Ravana on the chest with arrows.[400]

The bow fell down from Ravana's hand. Ravana, who had not been perturbed by the blows of Indra's weapon and lightning, now fainted due to Rama's arrows.

Rama felled Ravana's crown with another arrow. (*As he does not have a crown, Rama feels angry whenever he sees others' crown!*) "Ravana! So far, you have fought very valorously. You made all the great Vanara warriors faint and left me without any assistance. I am fighting alone. (*Ravana has been fighting alone since the beginning, hasn't he? When*

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400. By the time Rama started to fight with Ravana, Ravana had already fought with some warriors. He fought with Hanuman. Fought with Nila. Fought with Lakshmana. Again, he fought with Hanuman. By then Ravana's energies were exhausted. He fainted for some time. Even after getting up, he was so tired that he could not fight with Hanuman. In such a situation our great warrior, Rama, took a lot of rest and then came to fight with Ravana.

Have you noticed how shrewdly (*how cowardly*) the poet brought Rama into the battle! When two persons fight each other, usually a person who is more exhausted will be defeated, won't he? See how soon Ravana gets defeated!

★

nobody is to assist him, why do you need assistance?) I am sparing you since you are tired. I am permitting you to go back into your city. Take rest, bring armies with you and come on the chariot! Then you will see my valour" Rama stopped the battle. (*We need not be surprised for Rama left Ravana alive. It was his confidence that he would kill him finally, any way! To project Rama as a very kind hearted person and to increase the twists and turns in the story, the poet ought to leave Ravana alive!*)

Ravana felt insulted deeply. He had lost his crown. The chariot had gone. The charioteer had passed away. He went inside Lanka in agony.

Gods and sages (*the gang in the sky*) felt very happy on seeing Ravana's defeat.

★ ★

Just as a lion tortures an elephant and the Garuda bird tortures a serpent, Sri Rama tortured Ravana, didn't he? Ravana was afraid of Rama's arrows. His arrogance was suppressed. He entered Lanka with a sense of shame.

Recollecting Rama's arrows — which were very powerful like Brahma's staff and the curses of Brahmins — and feeling sad, Ravana sat on the throne and began to narrate to the others in the assembly. 'I am equal to Indra. A human being insulted such a great man like me. All my penance is futile. Brahma's words came true. — 'You will receive harm from human beings.' I did not think that I would face death at the hands of human beings.

Anaranya of Raghu dynasty (*who is this guy? A new face! Are there some more people of Raghu dynasty?*) said to me in the past, 'O Rakshasa! Wicked man! Base fellow! Do you know, a man who will destroy you totally will be born in our dynasty?' — Exactly the same thing has happened. This Rama also belongs to the Raghu dynasty. I think he was born to kill me.

In the past when I molested Vedavati, she cursed me. The same Vedavati is now born as Sita.

Whatever Parvati, Nandikeswara, Rambha and all others said in the past, the same has now happened.

The words of sages too can not be untrue. (*Alas! If there are any lies, it is sages' words only!*)

Knowing well about all these curses against me, we have to be careful in conquering the enemies.[401]

Kumbhakarna is a great valorous man. Nine days before the battle began, he discussed the strategy and went to sleep. He always sleeps for about seven or eight months at a stretch. When I am amidst so many troubles, that fool is sleeping comfortably. However valorous he may be, what is the use if he does not come to my rescue? I will have no worry if Kumbhakarna wakes up. He can surely kill Rama and Lakshmana. Go at once and wake him up", he commanded his ministers.

Some Rakshasas took all the eatables for Kumbhakarna and went to the place where he lived.

Kumbhakarna was sleeping like a mountain in a cave that had beautiful gold doors.

His exhalation was like a cyclone. It was pushing back those who entered the cave. It became difficult to walk forward. (*If exhalation pushes backwards, will the inhalation not pull forward?*)

Somehow, they tried and entered the cave with great difficulty. They kept heaps of cooked rice, heaps of various kinds of meat, pots of toddy and pots of blood.

First, they sang songs of awakening. They tried to wake him up by touching his body. It was of no use. They played conches, beat drums

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401. Yuddha kanda, sarga 60, slokas 6 to 13:

Earlier, Vibhishana, Malyavan or some other fellows told Ravana that death would approach him. Now, Ravana himself is saying, 'Death will approach me. It is Sri Rama who will kill me.' One who says to himself like this, should withdraw from the battle, shouldn't he? But he is still fighting! The portrayal of Ravana's character is so absurd!

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and shouted at the top of their voices. Even that was of no use. They held the hair of Kumbhakarna and pulled it. They bit his ears and nose. Poured several pots of water on him. Even that didn't work. They began to beat him with stones, trees, pestles, poles and clubs. They got exhausted while beating him and they found that useless. Kumbhakarna continued snoring very comfortably. All the Rakshasas thought together and drove horses, camels and elephants over Kumbhakarna.

A thousand elephants ran over him.

By then Kumbhakarna turned on the other side and opened his eyes with great effort. (*On seeing elephants in his bed, he might have thought them to be bugs!*)

As soon as he woke up, he pounced on the food. He ate pigs and male buffaloes. He drank toddy and blood.

All the Rakshasas who had hidden came out and saluted Kumbhakarna.

"Why have you woken up me ? What is the matter? Has any danger befallen the king? Otherwise, my brother would not wake me up! Even by punishing gods, I will remove my brother's fear", said Kumbhakarna. (*Very nice, my lad! You have uttered a happy word! Come on, get up quickly! There is lot of work for you!*)

Yelapaksha came forward and submitted. "We have never had any threat from the gods. (*Because there is no god!*) We are going to face harm due to human beings. The Vanara army has besieged Lanka. Rama of the Raghu dynasty (*This is like saying, "That boy from so and so family!*), has insulted Ravana horribly.

Kumbhakarna got uncontrollable anger. "Oh, I see! Is that man from the Raghu dynasty so great? All right? I will go to my brother only after I see his end", he rose up. (*Yes! Manliness must be like this!*)

"Don't be hasty, Kumbhakarna! You have to think what is good and what is bad and then start."

"All right", Kumbhakarna agreed. He took a bath, decorated himself, drank two thousand pots of toddy. (*The size of the pots is that of those pots at poet's house!*) and set out.

While Kumbhakarna was walking along the streets, he was shining like the sun. (*Then, how did the actual sun shine? Did he diminish in shining? The poet describes Rama's enemies also as suns and moons. Because, it will give credit to Rama if Rama defeats such very great men, isn't it?*)

On seeing Kumbhakarna, who was walking like a mountain, some Vanaras fainted.

Some sought refuge in Rama. Rama reassured every body. Seeing Kumbhakarna with surprise, Rama asked Vibhishana, "Vibhishana! Who is he? I have never seen such a tall warrior! (*What do you think, then? What do you know, there may be many warriors whom you have not yet seen! Decrease your arrogance!*) Tell me about him in detail!"

Vibhishana said everything about Kumbhakarna. "He is Kumbhakarna. Son of Viswavasu. (*It may be an insult to him to say 'he is my brother!'*) A great valorous man. He has conquered all the gods. As he began to **eat** all the worlds right from his birth, Brahma angrily cursed him, 'You are harassing every body. Always lie down as a dead person'. Then Ravana prayed to Brahma not to make him lie down always. Then Brahma modified his curse a little. 'Kumbhakarna will sleep for six months at a stretch, wake up one day at a time and again sleep for six months."

Since then Kumbhakarna has been sleeping like this.

Now, Ravana has had him woken up for the sake of battle.

On seeing Kumbhakarna, the Vanaras were afraid and fled. We have to tell them that he is not a Rakshasa with life but a big machine. (*This means, rulers tell lies to people like this!*) Otherwise, the Vanaras will not remain in the battle field! (*It means, Rama has agreed to tell this lie!*)

Rama called Nila and ordered, "Again, the battle is going to take place. Get everybody ready!"

"Yes sir! All are ready (*to run*)", said Nila.

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Kumbhakarna went to Ravana's mansion and saw his brother who sat on the throne with grief. (*In the next sloka, 'he saw his brother who sat in Pushpaka plane with grief!*)[402]

Kumbhakarna saluted the feet of his brother and asked, "Brother! What is the matter?"

Ravana began to tell him. "Rama is destroying all our forces. Important Rakshasas have died and none of the Vanaras has died. This is a big danger. Now you have to help me. I did not assign you any task in the past. You should drive away the enemy troops", he begged.

Kumbhakarna started to talk with lot of disinterest. "You did not think how much hardship would befall due to the abduction of Sita. This is the result of the foolish thing that you did. What is the use even if we think about it now? A wealthy fellow always does a future thing in the present and the present thing in future....." Kumbhakarna preached all the sermons of the world to his brother. He preached sermons as to how a king should think carefully and do things; at what times he ought to discharge Dharma (*duty*), Artha (*earning*) and Kaama (*sexual desire*) — especially when he ought to enjoy sex and when he ought not to enjoy sex; on whom, why and how he ought to apply tactics of Saama (*negotiating*), Daana (*giving money*), Bheeda (*creating dissensions*) and Danda (*using force*); what sort of ministers he ought to trust and what he ought to do in order to prevent danger .... (*Ravana had got him up without knowing about this man!.... Go and sleep, man!.... Battle is thousand times better than these sermons!*).... How a king ought to behave in the case of bad ministers.... *saying and saying and saying* all those things.... finally, Kumbhakarna said, "Did Vibhishana not tell you to give Sita back? That is the right thing. Do that."[403]

Hearing all the words of Kumbhakarna, Ravana frowned. "You are reprimanding me just as a teacher reprimands his student. It is all right. (*But which student will listen to his teacher?*)

Why do you talk of all those past things. Think that we have brought the matters to this stage either due to ignorance, arrogance or some other reason. Why should we dig up all that happened in the past? (The p*oet describes as if Ravana is acknowledging that all his deeds were due to ignorance and arrogance!*) Think of what to do now! Friendship is something that helps others who are in danger. A relative is one who helps at the right time. If you have love for me and if you feel that it is inevitable to continue the battle, spring into action. Rectify with your valour the mistake that I made due to ignorance."

Kumbhakarna cooled down realising that his brother had got angry and that he felt hurt. "Rakshasa king! As I am supposed to give you good advice I said that. But I can't bear you feeling sad. By killing Rama, I will remove your grief. I will prove whether I am a good friend or not. See how the people of Lanka — who are

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402. Yuddha kanda, sarga 62, slokas 4 & 6:

Where was Ravana when Kumbhakarna went to see him?

"Then Kumbhakarna entered Ravana's mansion which was shining. Just as Devendra shining. Just as Devendra saw Brahma, he saw from a distance Ravana who sat on the throne."

In another sloka, "Kumbhakarna went into Ravana's house, crossed the enclosures and saw his brother who sat with fear in the Pushpaka plane."

What is this? In Mythology, neither theme nor the way of telling things is proper. ★

403. Yuddha kanda, sarga 63, up to 22 slokas: We can see all the sermons, which Kumbhakarna preached Ravana in these slokas. With regard to Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana do not have the same attitude. Kumbhakarna has respect for his brother. Vibhishana tried to betray his brother. In that case, should there be a difference between the behaviour of the two characters or not? What is the difference if Kumbhakarna abuses Ravana as Vibhishana did? Does Kumbhakarna say, "What Vibhishana said is right. Do that!"

The poet is so anxious that he made Kumbhakarna praise Vibhishana! ★

grieving over the death of their relatives in the battle will feel happy on seeing Rama's death!

Don't you know my valour? I will fell down the sun along with stars. I will swallow the fire. I will drink up the seas. (*Alas! Kumbhakarna! Why all this boasting? You also talk like Rama?*) See how I troubled that Sugriva — who came to help Rama and Hanuman who burnt Lanka! Don't worry. You stay relaxed and enjoy pleasures. You will get Sita", he gave courage to his brother.

On hearing Kumbhakarna's words, Mahodara began his scathing criticism against Kumbhakarna. (*The words of this Mahodara are very confusing. We do not know on whose side he is advocating. He praises Rama, he praises Ravana. Every thing is confusing! All characters are confusing but this character is more confusing!*)

Mahodara became furious at Kumbhakarna and began to talk like this: "Kumbhakarna! You were born in a good race but your character is base. You are very arrogant. You are talking as if you alone know morals and the king does not know them. What scriptural knowledge have you more than the king does? The king has thought out every thing. You said one would get good results if he were engaged in duty, earning, sex at different times. How do you know about this? (*You are always obsessed with sleeping*). What sort of result will they be? (*This means, Mahodara is saying that nothing will befall and there will not be negative results even if one is not engaged in Dharma, Artha and Kama. While he said so, see what he says later!*)

We get good results for bad deeds. If people do bad things, they get grief but some times people get comfort as well. (*Then why should he say at the beginning itself, "Happiness if we do good deeds; sorrow if we do bad deeds; our past deeds are the cause of our happiness and grief.*) Men practise certain virtues for the sake of this world and the other world. But, even if they do not practise so and however unjustly one practises, they enjoy themselves without facing any harm. We can't say that Ravana committed a sin or wrong since he brought Sita. We cannot even say clearly that that sin is of a particular kind.[404] (He has defended Ravana, hasn't he? Later he praises Ravana).

It is all right! You say you will single-handedly kill all the enemies. You are prattling like this since you do not know how great the enemy is. Sri Rama is a great man. Rama single-handedly killed fourteen thousand men in Janasthaana. (*This means, Rama is stronger than those fourteen thousand people, isn't he? Kumbhakarna might be stronger than that Rama! How do you know that he is not stronger? You will know about it only when Kumbhakarna fights with Rama and gets defeated. Will it be confirmed that Sri Rama is greater than Kumbhakarna before Kumbhakarna goes to the battle?*)

You do not know that Rama is a furious lion. You are going to attack Rama as if you are going to wake up a sleeping serpent. Rama is a man of great lustre. Just as none can conquer death, none can conquer Rama. Do not think of battle with Rama any more!

I will suggest something so that all of us can live happily without battle. (*See what that idea is!*)

Your Excellency! Sita is under your custody, isn't she? She will yield to you whenever you want. Why do you worry. (*How many pots he might have drunk!*)

Your Excellency! Some of us smear blood

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404. Yuddha kanda, sarga 64, up to 108 slokas: Doubting the scriptural regulations, Mahodara is speaking. All these doubts are in the mind of the poet.

Scriptures simply say that "We face pleasures and grief in accordance with the deeds that we do." But it does not occur so. The fact that there is no connection between what the Scriptures say and what happens in life is confusing the poet a lot. It is the poet's doubt that "It is not happening in the world as they have said in scriptures?" He makes wicked characters talk these doubts here and there in the story.

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all over bodies, come to you and tell you that we have killed Rama and Lakshmana. You give us very good gifts. (*Oh, this tactic is for the sake of gifts!*) Declare through tom-tom that Rama and Lakshmana have died. Thinking that her husband has died, Sita will yield to you in order to live happily. You can live happily without fighting the battle. How is my trick?" he said.

Kumbhakarna became furious at Mahodara's words. "The cloud that does not rain makes thunders wastefully, but warriors do not boast unnecessarily. Without announcing they perform actions that are necessary and prove their valour. (*There are no warriors in ' Ramayana' my lad! They do little, prattle more!*)

Ravana is in this plight since he heeded cowards like you. (*Ravana was ready for the battle and he did not think of withdrawing from the battle, did he? Where is the question of heeding the words of cowards? See later! Kumbhakarna scathingly criticises Ravana!*) Though Ravana outwardly appears as a friend of Lanka, he is in fact is enemy of Lanka. That's why Lanka is in such a pathetic situation. The army perished. The treasury diminished. The king remained nominally a king.[405]

All right! I will compensate the entire loss that Lanka has suffered so far. I will destroy the enemy now and save Lanka."

Ravana smiled (*perhaps he did not understand that Kumbhakarna had abused him. Yeah, how can it be intelligible! Even great pundits could not understand Kumbhakarna's Sanskrit and gave different kinds of interpretations!*) "Kumbhakarna! Mahodara is afraid of Rama. There is no warrior like you. I had you woken up because of my confidence in you. Start for the battle right now. If they see you, all Vanaras will run away. Even Rama and Lakshmana will be afraid." Ravana hurried him on.

Holding a spear, Kumbhakarna rose and said, "I don't want troops. I will go alone."

"No. It is better if you have troops with you. If you go alone, you cannot withstand the valour of the Vanaras. (*I learnt a good lesson when I went alone!*)" So saying Ravana put a necklace of precious stones round Kumbhakarna's neck. He put some ornaments on his shoulder, placed rings to his fingers. Put on ear rings. (*Can he fight with all this weight?*) He put garlands fully round his neck. (*Will, then, the necklace of the precious stones, which he put a while ago, be seen?*)

Then Kumbhakarna wore a great shield. No weapon can pierce that shield. (*Except Rama's arrows!*)

Kumbhakarna started for the battle with great enthusiasm. He was as tall as 600 bows, as wide as 100 bows, his eyes were as big as the wheels of a cart and he looked like a great mountain. (*The height of a bow means the height of a human being. So Kumbhakarna is as tall as 600 human beings and as wide as 100 men.*)

Ravana blessed Kumbhakarna. (*Though I was not victorious, you will be victorious*).

Kumbhakarna started with the four wings of the army. (*Thank god! At least now he has started!*)

Serpents, lion, camels, deer, antelopes also followed him. (*Some translators say that we have to understand this as if the soldiers followed Kumbhakarna using serpents, lion, antelopes and camels as vehicles. All right! Let us accept that*).

Moving forward, Kumbhakarna said, "Vanaras cannot do any harm to us. Rama and Lakshmana are our enemies. I will kill them."

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405. Yuddha kanda, sarga 65, sloka 7: See Kumbhakarna's words. Kumbhakarna is reprimanding Ravana, "You are an enemy of Lanka, who appears like a friend!" Are these words appropriate to be spoken by Kumbhakarna who was ready to lay down his life for the sake of Ravana? As the poet's description of this character is not appropriate, some translators gave a different interpretation — that Kumbhakarna abused the ministers and not the king. They interpreted that he abused the ministers as follows: "You have spoiled the treasury and the army. You seem to have considered the king as an enemy." But this interpretation is not suitable to this sloka. If they try to conceal the mistake of the poet, it will be the mistake of his disciples. ★

(*“A while earlier, had he not said, “I will ill Sugriva, I will kill Hanuman.” Did Vanaras ot do any harm? What about the burning of anka by Hanuman? Whose forgetfulness is this – Kumbhakarana’s or the poet’s?*)

Foxes cried on his way. The Sun light iminished. The wind blew harshly. umbhakarna’s left hand trembled. An eagle sat n his head. A comet fell near his feet.

Yet Kumbhakarna went to the battle boldly.

On seeing Kumbhakarna, the Vanaras egan to flee.

While the Vanaras were running away, ngada shouted angrily. “Forgetting how alorous you are and how great your dynasties re, you are behaving like ordinary monkeys? *You stupid, monkey manners!*) Do you run away o save your life? (*What do you want them to o? You also run.* ***If you are alive, you can at east eat wretched Balusu leaves!***) That tall igure is not a Rakshasa who is fighting a battle. t is only a frightening toy. We can destroy it ith our valour. Come on! Come back! (*No, don’t ome! Angada became a stooge of Rama and is elling you lies. Don’t believe him. Go away!*)

All the Vanaras came back. They threw hills nd trees on to Kumbhakarna.

It was like a shower of flowers for umbhakarna. He began to beat the Vanara ands to death. (*Have you realised the fact of ngada’s lies?*)

The Vanaras began to run away again.

Angada began to shout again. “Stay there! on’t go! Come back!” (*Stop it, Shut up! You have already been spoiled. Why do you spoil them?*) If you are cowards like this, you will not have happiness wherever you go. Come on. Fight the battle. It is the character of base people to run away by giving importance to life. (*Should they think that service to the kings is more important than their life?*) Even wives ridicule those who flee the battle field. *What death will be there more than that?* Compared to that, dying in the battle is a matter of fame! You boast yourself amidst other people. You glorify yourselves. What happened to all that? The world laughs at cowards. Others will treat you carelessly. That’s why you have to follow the path of great warriors. Come on, come back! (*Don’t return! It is wrong, go away!*)

It is a matter of fame for us if we can kill Kumbhakarna. If we die, we will secure Brahma’s world which none will secure. Think, what infamy it is to flee! Can Kumbhakarna escape when Rama is there? (*Rama is there, isn’t he? Ask him to do this job!*)

Angada continued shouting.

Ignoring Angada’s shouting, the Vanaras were *showing the strength of their calves.* “Kumbhakarna is killing us. Our lives are dear to us.”

Angada shouted and shouted (*by describing all kinds of liquors available in the heaven and by describing the number of prostitutes available in heaven*) and finally brought all the Vanaras back. (*Some shrewd fellows might have hidden themselves somewhere.*)[406]

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06. Yuddha kanda, sarga 66, slokas 18 to 32:

See what Angada is saying to the fleeing soldiers. “Vanaras! Stop! Come back! You men, ithout manliness! It is not appropriate to run away in order to save your life. (*It is wrong to save our life. Lay down your lives and save the lives of the kings! This is very right!*) Even wives will idicule those who flee from fighting and stay alive. That itself is death for them.” (*Women are base, ren’t they? How insulting it is for men, if such base people insult them! Compared to that insult, ow great is the death in the battle! This is to make man superior than woman in order to sustain he soldier in the battle! Becoming a superior being than a woman, what does that soldier gain? e will be useful to his rulers. He will lay down his life for their sake.*)

See what more Angada is saying. “Vanaras! You are unworthy, base! (*The poet used the word anaaryaha’.*)

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As death is inevitable, all Vanaras began to flee. (*They are worried that they may not get Rambha if they do not fight valiantly.*)

Kumbhakarna hit the Vanaras with a hill-sized club and killed a hundred people at one blow and seven or eight thousand people at another stroke. He put sixteen or eighteen people in his mouth and swallowed them up. (*Is it Brahmaloka where Vanaras reach? Then what is Sri Rama is doing? Where has he hidden while his soldiers are dying?*)

Hanuman threw hills and trees on to Kumbhakarna. Kumbhakarna pushed away all those rocks and broke those trees like sticks of a broom and threw them away. This time, Hanuman brought a bigger mountain and threw it out at Kumbhakarna. Kumbhakarna got angry (*Won't he get angry?*) and pierced Hanuman's chest with a spear. Crying loudly for help, Hanuman fell down, vomited blood and fainted.

On seeing Hanuman fainted, the Rakshasas shouted with joy. (*The gang in the sky did not utter a single word!*)

Then Nila came and threw a big hill on Kumbhakarna. (*Oh! Always the same old kind of fighting. Why does Rama not begin the battle?*)

Kumbhakarna… that hill…. powder…..! (*We already knew about it!*)…..crushed into powder and hit Nila with his knees.

Kumbhakarna hit Sarabha with his fist. Slapped Gavaksha with the palm. Gave a kick to Gandhamadhana.

All fainted. (*Only fainting? Will they wake-up again?*)

All the Vanara soldiers angrily climbed on Kumbhakarna and jumped. (*Like children who climb a hill!*)

Kumbhakarna held those who sat on his shoulders and head with his fist, put them into his mouth. (*Just as putting cornflakes*) and began to swallow them up.

Some Vanaras jumped out through Kumbhakarna's nose and ears and began to run away. (*It seems the poet is very used to telling stories to infants. That habit might have inspired him to write this 'Ramayana'*)

While Kumbhakarna was attacking and killing Vanaras, all of them cried like orphans. (*Why? What happened to that saviour of orphans? Has he again immersed in the agony of romantic separation?*)

All Vanaras sought Rama's refuge.

Angada came (*Why should Angada come when they sought refuge in Rama?*) and threw a peak of a hill onto Kumbhakarna. Kumbhakarna threw a spear. Angada skilfully escaped, jumped and hit Kumbhakarna's chest with his hand.

Kumbhakarna fainted. (*The poet too is bored. He changed the story a little bit!*), rose up at once and hit Angada with his fist.

Angada fainted. (*Enough of fainting. Get up, you have to hit again.*)

Kumbhakarna held some Vanaras in his fist

➔ "People utter words of reproach about the cowards." (*This is to create fear for the public opinion. Fleeing the battle is treated as cowardice!*) "It will get us a lot of fame if we kill Kumbhakarna. Or, if we lose our lives, we will attain Brahmaloka by paying them (*the lives*). (*Have you noticed the number of ways to deceive a soldier? These are the ways of making him jump into the battle voluntarily!*)

Observe what the soldiers are saying despite so many tricks.

"While fleeing, the Vanaras uttered the following words that are condemned by the valiant. 'Kumbhakarna is cutting us up into pieces. This is not the time to stay. Life is dear to us', they said."

The poet knew that soldiers do not wish to lose their life, they hope to live and flee from battles. (*Kicking away the Brahma's world and Indra's world!*) That is why, many a time the Rakshasa soldiers and Vanara soldiers flee. None of the Vanara heroes is willing to give his life for the sake of Rama. People like Angada are not ordinary soldiers. The need will not arise when they have to lay down their lives.

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and began to put them one by one into his mouth and swallowed them like *jidis* (small, round shaped Telugu chocolates). (*Kumbhakarna! If you simply put them in the mouth they will run away through your ears and nose. Sipping is an intelligent thing!*)

Sugriva angrily said, "Why do you show your valour on ordinary people? (*Show it on this extra-ordinary man!*) Look, I am throwing a hill. Watch out". He threw a hill at him and hid himself (*Lest it comes back and fallen on him!*)

"Oh! I see, you are Sugriva? Why are you roaring like a bull?" saying so he crushed that hill into powder, put another *jidi* into the mouth and threw the spear on to Sugriva.

That spear was made of a thousand weights.

Hanuman jumped up with one jerk, took that spear, broke it with his knees and threw it away.

Kumbhakarna angrily brought a big hill and hrew it on to Sugriva.

Sugriva fainted and fell down. (*Now, the battle is interesting!*)

Kumbhakarna lifted him, put him under his armpit and ran into Lanka.

Gods in the sky felt upset. (*Are you still here? Why don't you catch hold of Kumbhakarna and release Sugriva? Is it not possible for you? What sort of gods are you? Stupid gods! Get out! Your faces are disgusting!*)

"I can save Sugriva but it will be an insult o Sugriva if I save him? He can save himself", hinking so, Hanuman remained silent.

While Kumbhakarna was walking in Lanka, people there sprinkled fragrant water on his back. The water fell on Sugriva and he woke up. (*Alas! What a foolish thing that people in Lanka did? Doesn't matter. Sugriva will faint again if he ees Kumbhakarna's armpit when he wakes up!*)

Sugriva thought for a while, pinched Kumbhakarna's ears with his nails, bit his nose with his teeth and tore off his flank.

Kumbhakarna pressed Sugriva and felled him down.

Sugriva flew up and reached Rama.

Kumbhakarna again came back running and began to chase Vanaras in the battlefield and eat a hundred of them, seven of them and twenty of them. (W*hat are these numbers? Numbers that suit the rhyme!*)

Vanaras sought refuge in Rama. (*No use. He cannot do anything.*)

Lakshmana first shot seven arrows and later some more at Kumbhakarna. (*Have you noticed? When they sought refuge of Rama, Lakshmana went to their rescue!*)

Ignoring Lakshmana, Kumbhakarna ran toward Rama.

Rama threw '*Roudraastra*', the arrow of anger. (*Don't you have arrow of lies?*)

Unable to control his anger, Kumbhakarna threw a hill at him.

That hill was about to kill two hundred people but Rama crushed it into powder. Then Lakshmana gave him an idea, "Rama! If all Vanaras climb on to Kumbhakarna, he will fall down due to their weight. Then we can kill him." (*Stupid idea!*)

All Vanaras climbed and sat on Kumbhakarna.

Kumbhakarna shook off his body at once. All the heroes among heroes fell off scattered hither and thither.

Lifting the bow, Rama said angrily, "I have personally come to the battle! (*Ah, how quickly you have come!*) You can no longer withstand the attack." (*Well, then, so many Vanaras would not have died had you come at the beginning itself!*)[407]

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407. See, when Rama began fighting — after a long time after Kumbhakarna entered the battlefield! By then Kumbhakarna had fought with so many warriors.

He fought with Hanuman. With Nila, with Sarabha, with Gavaksha, with Gandhamadhana, with Angada, with Sugriva, with Hanuman, with Lakshmana. Besides so many warriors, he also fought with thousands of soldiers. After so much battle had taken place and Kumbhakarna lost his ears nd nose and fainted, our hero entered the battle field. See how quickly Kumbhakarna gets defeated! After Sri Rama entered the battle, the enemy should not be alive for a long time, isn't it? ★

Kumbhakarna laughed sarcastically. (*Well laughed!*) “Are you Rama? Do you think I am like Viradha, Kabandha or Vali? I am Kumbhakarna! Show me your valour, I will see it”, he laughed again. (*Hey, you have laughed well again!*)

Rama hit Kumbhakarna with an arrow — which was like the one with which he pierced seven Sala trees and which was like the one with which he killed Vali!

That great arrow touched Kumbhakarna’s body like a drizzle of water.

However many arrows that Rama shot, Kumbhakarna returned them with his weapons!

Rama shot a *Vaayavya* arrow and cut off Kumbhakarna’s hand. That hand, while falling on the ground, killed thousands of Vanaras. Kumbhakarna *routed* a tree with his other hand and threw it on to Rama. Rama cut that hand off also with arrows. Later he cut off the feet. Yet Kumbhakarna came running with his mouth open, to swallow Rama. Rama hit arrows in the entire mouth of Kumbhakarna. Kumbhakarna fell down. Rama shot Indra’s arrow. It cut off Kumbhakarna’s head. With this, Kumbhakarna died.

All the gods in the sky praised and worshipped Sri Rama.

★ ★

On hearing that Kumbhakarna had died, Ravana fainted.

All the relatives of Kumbhakarna grieved for him.

Recovered from the faint, Ravana began wailing. “Alas! Kumbhakarna! All these days you have been my right hand man. Relying on you, I have been very courageous. How could Rama kill a great warrior like you? Why do I need this kingdom without you? Why Sita? Why my life? Every thing has happened as Vibhishana had said. I did not listen to what he had said. Moreover, I banished such a noble man from the kingdom. That sin is haunting me like this. It is waste of life if I don’t kill Rama who killed my brother. I will start for the battle field right now”, he wailed in many ways.[408]

Trisirassu is Ravana’s son. He has three heads. He said to his father, “Your Excellency! Why do you wail like an ordinary man? You can very easily conquer the three worlds. Is a big person like you needed to kill Rama? I will go”

Narantaka, Devantaka and Atikaya are also Ravana’s sons. They too were ready for the battle. (*This is the advantage if you have many wives! You will have many sons!*)

Ravana felt happy and sent his brothers called Matta and Yuddhonmatta.

Those six persons started off with the troops.

(*This time they have not seen bad omens. Perhaps they might have thought that it won’t look nice if they always described them!*)

The battle started. As usual, Rakshasas initially became frenzy and began to fight.

Throwing mountains and trees by Vanaras, crushing them into powder by Rakshasas, cries for help, lion-like roaring, blood pools, abuses, shouts, joy of gods in the sky — Everything was as usual! An utterly old fashioned battle!

After the battle took place like this for some time, Angada tore up the horse of Narantaka with his finger nails and killed it.

Unable to control his anger, Narantaka hit Angada with the fist.

Angada fainted, rose up (*how ‘cheap’ is fainting!*), hit and killed Narantaka.

After Narantaka died, all the remaining Rakshasa warriors surrounded Angada and fought with him. Without receiving a single blow, Angada fought with every body skilfully, contrary to the others’ imagination.

Meanwhile, Hanuman hit Devantaka and killed him.

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408. Yuddha kanda, sarga 68, slokas 21 & 23: After Kumbhakarna died, Ravana did not withdraw from the battle. He was hoping to defeat and kill the enemy. Such Ravana — see how he is talking! “Due to my ignorance (*agnyanat* = due to ignorance), I did not heed Vibhishana’s advice. I banished the virtuous Vibhishana. Such sin resulted in this agony of mine.” So far, the poet has made all the Rakshasas praise Vibhishana. Now, he is making Ravana too praise him. ★

Nila threw a big mountain and killed Mahodara along with the elephant.

Hanuman tore the horses of Trisiras with nails and killed them. Later, he got hold of the sword of Trisiras and slayed all the three heads of Trisiras.

Gods in the sky felt happy. (*Whenever some thing favourable to Rama's group happens, assume that the gang in the sky enjoys it, otherwise it remains silent! I cannot repeat whatever I said…whatever I said……*)

Hitting with the club, Rishabha killed Matta.

Slapping him with his palm, Gavaksha killed Unmatta.

The Rakshasa troops began to flee.

Atikaya angrily turned his chariot this way and came. (Where was he roaming about all this while?)

Surprised on seeing him, Rama asked Vibhishana. "He is coming on a chariot with thousand horses. There are four charioteers. There are twenty quivers at one place, ten at another place and eight at the other place in the chariot. There are two swords of ten arms length, with golden handles of *four arms length* each. He is shining like the Sun and Moon! Who is he?"

"This man is the son of Ravana — who is a man of great lustre, man of great enthusiasm, brother of Kubera and who is a Rakshasa king. He was born to Dhanyamalini. His name is Atikaya. He is as valorous as his father. He is acquainted with all skills in using arrows and weapons. He got a boon from Brahma that he would not die at the hands of gods. That chariot and shield had been given by Brahma. Even Indra's Vajraayudha will be ineffective before his arrows. (*Indra! Why do you live?*) It is better o kill this man quickly without any delay", said Vibhishana. (*The sooner you kill this man, the sooner I get the kingdom!*)

All Vanaras attacked Atikaya. Battle again! Mountains and trees flew again and again…. They jumped…. powder…. powder…. powder! Atikaya felt vexed with this job of pounding mountains into powder. "How long should I fight with *these dirty faces*? Come on, if there are ome noble men!", he shouted. (*Rama! Why don't you go? Why don't you move when he is calling noble men?*)

Lakshmana started.

Seeing Lakshmana, Atikaya laughed and said, "You stupid fellow. What do you know of fighting? Get out of this place! (*Ask your brother to come!*) To fight with a great man like me, a kid like you?"

Gathering great anger, Lakshmana said, "You will not become a great man simply because you claim it. Don't boast about yourselves like this. (*I will boast about myself.*) If I lift my bow — see what I will do? I will fell your head like a palm fruit. You are ridiculing me because I am young. Did Maha Vishnu who was young not occupy all the three worlds with his feet?"

Listening to the 'rationalism' of Lakshmana (*heetumat* = filled with reason; reasonable; rational), Atikaya became furious. (*Yes, will the rationalism that glorifies Maha Vishnu not make him furious?*) He dumped arrows on to Lakshmana.

Lakshmana too dumped arrows.

Both of them broke each other's arrows. One great arrow came and hit Atikaya strongly.

As Lakshmana's arrow hit him hard, Atikaya was fascinated and praised Lakshmana. "Ah, what a great warrior you are!" Unable to bear that pain, he held the chariot and withstood the pain without falling down.

Later, however great arrows that Atikaaya shot at him, Lakshmana avoided them 'with extreme care'.

Lakshmana used *Agneeya* arrow. Atikaya used *Surya* arrow and felled it down.

Then again *Ishikastra X Ayndastra*. Ah! One should see the battle of these two arrows. We cannot describe it.

Next, again, *Yamyaastra X Vayavyaastra*.

Meanwhile, Lakshmana fainted for a while, woke up, shot very great arrows and destroyed Atikaya's chariot, horses and charioteers. (*It was a chariot, which Brahma had given them! He must have sent some old vehicle! We shouldn't trust Brahmas and* ***Grimhas***!)

However great arrows were shot at Atikaya, his shield remained in tact. (*Where did he get it* *stitched?*)

Lakshmana was unable to decide what to do. (*Why don't you call your brother, man! Why hasn't he come yet?*)

In the meantime, god of wind came and whispered in the ears of Lakshmana, "Brahma gave that shield. You cannot destroy it with other arrows. (*You can destroy the chariot.*) You have to use Brahma's arrow only." So whispering, he left. (*It seems Brahma and god of wind are not on good terms with each other! Why the hell have they quarrelled!*)

With great valour, Lakshmana released Brahma's arrow. On seeing it Atikaya was frightened. Hitting it with an axe, Shakti and many more weapons, he made all possible attempts to stop it at any cost. But nothing worked.

Brahma's arrow came and cut off Atikaya's head.

The Rakshasas fled away. (*Joy for the gang in the sky!*)

Lakshmana went to Rama and bowed again.

★ ★

On hearing that Atikaya had died, Ravana became very angry. "Rama killed all the Rakshasas. Oh! How valorous Rama is! I think he must be imperishable Sriman Narayana! I don't find any one who can kill Rama. Guard Lanka and Asoka vana carefully." He ordered Rakshasas and left home sadly.

As soon as the Rakshasas, who fled from the battle field for Lanka, informed him that Trisiras, Atikaya and others were killed, Ravana fainted.

Indrajit consoled his father. "You need not faint when Indrajit is alive. I vow that I will kill Rama and Lakshmana. Gods will be shocked to see my valour." He gave courage to his father and started for the battle on a mule, after his father blessed him.

Behind him, the army started sitting on horses, elephants, camels, pigs, tigers, peacocks, scorpions and snakes (*What about ants?*)

Indrajit arrived in the battle field, lit the fire in the altar and sacrificed a black goat.

The fire at once burnt without smoke and the flames cicumambulated from left to right and indicated a good beginning.

The god of fire came in person and received *Havis*, the oblation offered at the sacrifice.

Performing the spells on his chariot, horses, weapons and every thing, (*Mules at the time he started! Now, horses! What can we do? This is a holy text!*) Indrajit ascended the chariot flew into the sky and disappeared.

The battle started again.

Again, a rain of hills! A rain of powder!

A rain of trees! A rain of powder!

Without appearing before Vanaras, Indrajit rained arrows like the rain in the sky.

"We will lay down our lives for Sri Rama!" Some Vanaras held hills and trees and were jumping and falling on the ground.

Because of the rain of arrows of Indrajit, the entire Vanara army fell down. Some died. Some fainted.

Indrajit hit Gandhamadhana with 18 arrows, Nala with 9 arrows, Mainda with 7 arrows, Gaja with 5 arrows, Jambavan with 10 arrows and Nila with 30 arrows. — Thus, he killed many crores of people.

Indrajit shot arrows into the eyes of those who were looking at the sky for the whereabouts of Indrajit.

Hitting with arrows, he killed Sugriva and Angada also. Finally, he began to thrash Rama and Lakshmana with arrows.

Sri Rama expressed his worry to Lakshmana. "Lakshmana! This Indrajit is torturing us with Brahma's arrow. How can we kill him? This is Brahmastra. You have to bear its pain. (*Of course, I am bearing it.*) Be bold. All Vanara warriors fell down. After we fell down abandoning our manliness, Indrajit thinks that the victory is his and will go inside Lanka."

Meanwhile, Indrajit's arrows hit the two brothers and they fainted.

Roaring like a lion, Indrajit went inside Lanka happily.

While the Vanaras were wailing, Vibhishana consoled them. (*It seems he does not yield to Brahmastra, except to* ***Rajyastra****, the arrow of the desire for kingdom!*) "This is not the time to grieve. (*True, it is the time to feel happy since* *ma fainted. If the battle ceases, we can go me.*) As they are obliged to worship Brahma's row, Rama and Lakshmana have fainted not cause they are incapable, you know!"

In order to respect Brahma, Hanuman nted for a while and rose up. (*Thinking it was ough to respect for a while!*) He said to bhishana, "We have to console the survivors."

Holding lighted wisps (torch) Hanuman and bhishana are roaming around the battle field the darkness. All the soldiers are found dead th their feet, hands, flanks, lips, tails and heads t. Sugriva, Nila, Nala, Angada and many more ople are lying dead.[409]

In a short while, during that day time, drajit shot arrows and killed 67 crores of nara warriors.

Vibhishana and Hanuman roamed about arching Jambavan. Finally they found him.

Seeing Jambavan, Vibhishana asked, "You ve not lost your life, have you?" (*Perhaps, he uld say 'I have lost'!*)

Suffering with pain, Jambavan asked oaning, "Are you Vibhishana? I can not see u. Some arrows struck my eyes. Is Hanuman ve?"

"Why are you asking about Hanuman thout enquiring about Rama? Do you love numan more than Rama and Sugriva?" bhishana expressed surprise.

"I asked so because (*It is neither love nor ll!*), if Hanuman is alive, it means all are alive. he is not alive there is no way for any one to e. (*This means, there is no way for Rama to cover from his faint!*) This is why I asked", d Jambavan.

Hanuman touched Jambavan's feet, saluted n (*why salutation. It is a wasteful exercise. nbavan can't see it!*) and said, "It is me"

Jambavan said with joy, "Come my lad! You are Hanuman. You alone have to save the Vanaras. Cross the sea and go over to Himalaya mountain. Over there, between Rishabha mountain and Kailasa mountain, there is a medicinal mountain. (*Earlier Sushena said that this medicinal mountain was in the midst of the milk sea. Now, it is on Himavatgiri! All right! Let it be somewhere!*) There are medicines named *mrita sanjiivanii* (= one which makes the dead regain life), *visalya karanii* (= one which cures wounds that arrows cause), *saavarnya karanii* (= one which causes good colour), and *sandhaana karanii* (= one which joins the broken limbs). Go and get them quickly and save the Vanaras. Remove the pain of Rama and Lakshmana. Start now itself." He hurried Hanuman.

Hanuman began to increase his body quickly. (*Others come only next to him in swelling!*). That mountain sank into the earth due to the pressure of Hanuman's feet. The mountain broke into pieces. As the mountain was swinging, Vanaras could not stand. (*We do not know about making others regain life, he may make the living persons die!*)

While that mountain was swinging, all the houses in Lanka collapsed, all the doors broke down and it appeared as if Lanka was dancing.

Before he climbed Malaya mountain, he prayed to Rama before he flew from there. (*If you make me fly, I will make you regain life!*) Owing to the speed of Hanuman's flying, the sea surged with tidal waves. Trees and mountains routed themselves and followed Hanuman as if some one else is dragging them.

Crossing the great sea and seeing pebbles-like great mountains, threads-like great rivers, lakes, water falls and wealthy countries, Hanuman reached the Himalayas.

He flew over the Himalayas seeing the

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9. Yuddha kanda, sarga 73, slokas 43 to 45:

"With arrows that tear the vital parts, the mighty Indrajit made Mainda, Gaja, Jambavan, Nila, griva and Angada lifeless." (*nishpraanaan* = lifeless, akarot = made). Jambavan is in the list of ad, isn't he? But when Hanuman and others searched, Jambavan was found alive!

Sarga 74, slokas 10 & 11: "Hanuman and Vibhishana saw Sugriva, Angada, Nala, Nila, shena (and many more) dead.

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hermitages of celestial sages.(*Oh, I see! These animals are there as well!*) He saw many more: *Brahma koosam* (place of Brahma); *sukralaya* (Indra's place); *rudrasara mooksham* (*where Rudra threw arrows. On which enemies?*), *Brahma siirsham* (*where Siva cut Brahma's head. So, even gods had so much grudge against each other that they cut off each other's heads!*); *yama kinkara sthaana* (*the place where messengers of Yama, lord of death, stay. Why do they stay in the Himalayas? As they always stand near hot oil pans and fire poles, perhaps they go to snow mountains for cool breeze for a short while*), *suurya bandhana* (*where the sun is stopped. Which devoted wife stopped him?*), *Brahmaasanam* (*Throne of Brahma. Does Brahma come and sit here?*), *Vasundhara naabhi* (*The way to the nether world. My god! If Rakshasas come from that side?*), *Kailasa* mountain and *Meru* mountain.

The mountain of medicines glowed like a flame.

Hanuman climbed that mountain and roamed around.

All the medicines realised that somebody had come to take them away and disappeared. (*What a shrewd medicines! So, they will surely act!*)

Hanuman got very angry and roared like a lion. "O Mountain of medicines! Don't you have mercy on Rama? If you do not show medicines, I will crush you into powder with the strength of my shoulders", saying so, he routed that mountain which was full of elephants and huge trees and returned flying to the surprise of the gods.

Just as Sri Maha Vishnu held the shining wheel, Hanuman held the mountain of medicines, which was shining like the Sun and came back with lion-like roaring. As soon as he reached, he saluted all important Vanaras and hugged Vibhishana. (*It might be the joy that he returned with life!*)

Smelling Visalya karani, Rama and Lakshmana rose up comfortably from their fainting fit. All the Vanaras rose up too.

The sharp pointers of the arrows fell off from their bodies, the wounds got healed, all were relieved of the pain and got up as if they had woken up from their sleep.[410]

There was no use of mountain of medicines for Rakshasas. Because, right from the beginning of the battle in Lanka, Ravana ordered the Rakshasas to throw the dying Rakshasas into the sea. He ordered so because the enemies would come to know how many of his soldiers had died. Since then the living Rakshasas had been throwing the dead Rakshasas into the sea. (*This arrangement is meant to answer such questions as: 'Will the air of Sanjivi mountain not touch the Rakshasas? Will they not wake up?'*)

After all the Vanaras got up, Hanuman went back to Himalayas again, kept the medicinal

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410. Facts are the bases for all myths. If some body says, "Hanuman can fly well", we have to turn it into reality. This means, he went to a neighbouring village or neighbouring hills and brought herbs and leaves, which the doctor had asked for. As he did not know what exactly those leaves were, he routed all those plants.

Hanuman brought medicines and brought to life all those who were dead. As there was such an arrangement, the poet made Sugriva and Angada die. The next moment he brought them back to life.

When talking to Kumbhakarna, Ravana said, "Only Rakshasa warriors died. None of the Vanaras has died", do you remember? Thus, a criticism arises: why did any of the important Vanaras die? Therefore, the poet, in order to appear honest, killed some important Vanaras as well. But, as they regained life immediately, there was no loss for Rama's group. Have you observed? *"If the person who serves food is our man, what does it matter even if we sit at the end?* Similarly, if the poet is our man.......?

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mountain back in its original place, returned and stood obediently in front of Rama!

(*The war is not yet over, isn't it? Will there be no need of that medicinal mountain again? Why couldn't they keep it here?...Even if a need arises, how great task it is! Hanuman will jump up once again and get it.*)

★ ★

Sugriva said to Hanuman, "What strength does Ravana have now? Kumbhakarna has died. His sons have died too. Why will Ravana come for the battle? All those who are strong among you, go to Lanka and burn it"

After it became dark, the Vanara warriors picked up fire sticks and entered Lanka.

All the guards of Lanka ran away after seeing the Vanaras. The Vanaras, with great enthusiasm, lit fire to the fort, mansions in all corners and to all houses in every street and lane. (*However magical the Rakshasas are, whatever form they can assume and however deceitfully they can fight, they shut their mouths as if they are incapable of doing any thing.*)

Lanka burnt with great flames.

While the mountain-like mansions were glowing with flames, who could describe that beauty? Great mansions, sandal wood doors, grand beds, seats, jute clothing, silk clothing, gold, silver, ornaments studded with diamonds and precious stones, rugs of sheep hair, animal houses, armoury, chariots, shields, swords, bows, quivers, skin mats, heaps of spices — not just this or that, every thing turned into ashes.

(*Vibhishana! You talked of 'welfare of Lanka!' 'Welfare of Lanka!' Are you witnessing the welfare of Lanka? When everything is burnt down and turned into ashes, what will you rule? Will you do coal business with foreign countries?*)

The fire burnt down all the people in Lanka: those who wore good garments and garlands of flowers; those who were swinging in the intoxication of liquor and meat; those who were immersed in sex with their loves. (*However terrible the situation may be, the poet does not forget sex. His head is full of that dirt!*), those women who were running with their infant children — the fire burnt down every body and shone very brightly.

Noble women who lay down in airplanes wailed.

As soon as animal houses caught fire, the caretakers of horses and elephants untied all the animals. The elephants began to run on seeing the horses and the horses ran on seeing elephants in all directions. The houses burning with flames, looked like fully blossomed *Modugu* trees. The voices of the women who were crying amidst fire and smoke were heard ten *yojanas* away. (*Except to Rama!*)[411]

With burning houses and gates, Lanka is glittering like shining sky. The light of Lanka reflected in the surrounded sea and the sea became a red sea.

Vanaras jumped on Rakshasas who were burning with fire.

Rama, the great, shot arrows at the peak of Lanka and broke it into pieces. (*How many attempts to destroy Lanka!*)

Rakshasas are resisting. They are still fighting the battle. In that fierce battle, that might become the might of death. (*As it does not look nice if he said that 'Rakshasas had not resisted', the poet says Rakshasas also fought fiercely. What is the use of fighting a battle fiercely! The poet sir will not allow them win, will he?*)

Sugriva called Vanara warriors and ordered,

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411. When Indrajit tied Rama and Lakshmana with Naga paasa (*snake-like arrows*), what did Garutman — who came to treat them — say to Rama? "Leaving infant children and aged people, destroy al the enemies", did he not say this? Who, then, saved the aged and the children from the flames. The moral, which the *Dharma Saastra*, moral science, says, is, "Don't torture or kill infant children, women and the aged. But no body practises this moral. Even in the present day wars as well.

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"Besiege the nearby gates. Kill the Vanaras, who defy my orders, on the spot.[412]

(*Throughout the holy book of Ramayana, is there any word other than 'killing'?*)

Vanara warriors took burning sticks and went to the gate of Ravana's chamber.

Then Ravana got very angry. (*What is the urgency of your anger? You can get it after a year.*)

He rose up angrily and sent Kumbha, Nikumbha, Yupaksha and Sonitaksha to the battle with a huge army. The Rakshasa troops smeared sandal paste, wore garlands of flowers, decorated themselves and started off with shining swords, axes, arrows, spears…..(*There are many more Sanskrit weapons. None of the translators have translated their names!*)

Just as the band of locusts jump into fire, the Rakshasa troops also jumped into the battle.

The battle started again. (*You need not tell about it Mr. Poet! Your own people will win.*)

The Rakshasas slayed the Vanaras with various kinds of weapons.

The Vanaras bit and tore the Rakshasas.

A fellow beat back the one who beat him.

One fellow pushed another fellow who pushed him.

One fellow abused another fellow who abused him.

One fellow bit another fellow who bit him.

"Look! Come here! Fight with me!"

"I am coming!"

"Come on! Death has approached you"

"He will not come. I will see your end"

"Why do you take the trouble? You can't defeat me"

"Look, stay here. I am challenging you"

— Both the sides shouted and beat each other.

The clothing of some soldiers slipped down. The weapons of some soldiers fell down. The locks of hair are unlocked.

The Vanaras chased the fleeing Rakshasas.

Angada began his battle with Kampana when the Rakshasa troops arrived. Kampana hit Angada with a huge club.

Angada brought a huge mountain and threw it on Kampana. Kampana trembled, fell down and died.

On seeing Kampana's death, Sonitaksha came on his chariot to Angada and hit him severely with terrible arrows. Angada got angry and destroyed Sonitaksha's chariot by throwing a huge mountain. Sonitaksha picked up a sword and a shield and jumped into the sky. Angada too jumped, snatched the sword from Sonitaksha and hit him with it on his shoulder diagonally as if he wore *yagnopavita*, the sacred thread. Even then Sonitaksha again picked up a big club and jumped on Angada. Yupaksha and Vrjamgha also came to help Sonitaksha and began to fight Angada.

Again — Arrows X Trees = Powder.
Mountains X Arrows = Powder.

(*Battle means fighting! Killing! Let it happen between any two groups, what change will be there, unless they give it up!*)

Angada hit on the hand of Vrajangha with the fist. The sword in the hand of Vrajangha fell down. Vrajangha (*My god! What is this name! 'Mouth is not turning' to pronounce! Did his mother find this name alone? Some priest in that village must have given him this name!*) angrily punched Angada with the fist. Angada fainted for a moment, woke up, picked up the sword and cut off Vrajangha's head.

Immediately Yupaksha pounced upon

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[412] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 75, slokas 42 & 43:** "The great Sugriva ordered the Vanaras to besiege nearby gates of Lanka and fight." "You stay at various places and attack those who defy my orders and kill them immediately" — This means some Vanara soldiers were not willing to burn Lanka and attack the mansions and so on. Such soldiers do not actively participate in war. Sugriva is asking to identify such soldiers and kill them immediately.

Though a soldier does not like to do whatever the king orders, he would kill the soldier of the other side as per the king's order as he has to escape from his death. ★

Angada. Dividha came and caught hold of Yupaksha. Sonitaksha came and hit on the chest of Dvividha with a club. Dvividha removed that club. Meanwhile Mainda came and hit Yupaksha.

Two eyes are not enough to watch the battle between Sonitaksha — Yupaksha and Mainda — Dvividha. (*All bunkum! Always kicking-blowing, hitting-beating, shouting-slapping..... every thing is like this! If you do not believe watch it now!*)

Dvividha scratched Sobhitaksha with nails, felled him down, stamped him with his feet and killed him.

Mainda pressed Yupaksha with his hands and killed him. The Rakshasa army fled to Kumbha.

Kumbha rained arrows on Dvividha. Dvividha fainted. Mainda brought a huge mountain and threw it on Kumbha. Kumbha threw fire arrows and crushed it into powder and hit Mainda on his vital parts with an arrow. Mainda too fell down. Immediately, Angada brought a huge mountain. Again a fierce battle took place between the arrows and the mountains.

Kumbha hit on Angada's forehead with great arrows. Blood surged like a water fall and Angada's eyes closed.

Closing his eyes with one hand, Angada routed a Sala tree and threw it on Kumbha.

(*To demonstrate Angada's valour and to make him drag a tree with one hand, it is enough if one hand is injured, isn't it? He could drag the tree with the other hand. Instead of this — injury to the eyes, closing eyes with one hand and he had to drag the tree with the other hand — why this entire round about way?*) After all this, when Angada threw a tree with such a great effort, Kumbha crushed it into powder. Moreover he hit Angada so much that he lost consciousness.

Angada lay without regaining consciousness for a while. (*Look, Hanuman! You kept that mountain of medicines back there. Now what should we do? You always do things hastily!*)

The Vanaras told Rama that Angada had fainted. (*Why? To set the tune of wailing?*)

Rama called Jambavan and ordered him to attack Kumbha. (*What man? What are all of you doing? Are you 'trimming your nails'?*)

Jambavan, Sushena, Vegadarsi and other warriors routed great mountains, huge trees and pounced upon Kumbha. (*Devotees of Rama can research into such matters as how many mountains and trees did the Vanaras use in this battle: how many varieties and what varieties did they use and so on. One researcher must research on mountains, another on trees. If the same person begins research on both the topics out of enthusiasm, one life time is not enough — unless he lives for six hundred years by the grace of Rama!*)

All right! Kumbha rained arrows. He crushed all the hills into powder. Unable to move forward amidst Kumbha's rain of arrows, all the Vanara warriors folded their tails and stood still. Then Sugriva brought *Aswakarna* trees and threw them. (*Have the Sala trees been exhausted?*)

Kumbha, with his harsh arrows..... those Asva karma trees..... powder!

Sugriva snatched Kumbha's bow, broke it and laughed sarcastically. "You shot arrows very well. You are as great as Mahendra. How many people did your father and grand father harass? You too have inherited their character. I would have killed you with one blow. But you are tired after fighting with great warriors. If I kill you now, all people will say, "Look! This Sugriva has killed mercilessly a man who is tired." I am hesitating as it does not look nice. Go. Relax for some time and come back! Then see what my strength is", said Sugriva. (*Nay, it is not like that. Your tactic is that you can avoid battle if you leave him now! Sugriva says one should not fight with a man who is tired after fighting with many people. But, what has Rama been doing whenever he entered the battle field?*)

In response to Sugriva's words, Kumbha pounced angrily on Sugriva. Both the fellows dashed against each other like elephants. Dragged each other swiftly. (*Oh, my god! Will the back be not bruised?*) Deep ditches formed due to their jumping. The sea surged with high tides!

Sugriva lifted Kumbha and threw him into the sea.

Kumbha came flying. (*Let your mother's belly turn into gold! You could come out of the sea!*) and hit Sugriva.

Just as the Meru mountain got its lustre due to the blow of Vajrayudha, Sugriva's body got great lustre due to the blow of Kumbha. (*Then, what is the problem? It is enough if someone hits Sugriva!*)

Although he got a lustre due to Kumbha's blow, Sugriva, without any gratitude, hit Kumbha with his fist, which was like Vajrayudha. With that blow, Kumbha did not get any lustre but fell down and lost his life! Because of Sugriva's bold action, the earth full of hills, forests and seas, trembled with fear.

Looking at Sugriva as if would burn him since he had killed Kumbha. Nikumbha came rotating Parigha, a brilliant club, which looked like a mountain and pounced upon Sugriva wrathfully. Many jewels hung from his neck. (*May be they are amulets!*). Owing to the speed with which he was rotating the club, the wind changed into seven kinds. The sky trembled along with planets. On seeing Nikumbha's club, Vanaras ran with fear.

Expanding his chest, Hanuman came close to Nikumbha. Nikumbha rotated his club swiftly and gave a blow on Hanuman's chest. (*That's it!*)

Just as a hill smashes another hill, the club broke into pieces and the pieces scattered all over.

Angered by the blow of the club, Hanuman tightened his fist and hit Nikumbha on his chest. As soon as Hanuman's fist hit Nikumbha's chest, sparks of fire flew out suddenly. With his chest broken, blood flooded, Nikumbha, unable to control his anger, held Hanuman tightly with his arm and began to drag him.

The Vanaras cried out in fear. Hanuman hit and gave blows to Nikumbha, struggled to come out of Nikumbha's grip, jumped up and again fell on Nikumbha like a hill.

He caught hold of Nikumbha's neck with his two hands, strangled it, twisted it and broke it with a big noise.

In response to that bold action, the earth trembled. The sky shattered.

★ ★

On hearing that Kumbha and Nikumbha had died, Ravana became furious and ordered Makaraksha, "My child! Go to the battle. Kill Ravana and the Vanaras!"

Makaraksha is the son of Khara. Feeling joy at the king's command, he started off enthusiastically with a huge army and weapons. (*Starting for the battle, dying, starting again, dying again... again... again... again... how long will this continue! It seems this should continue until all Rakshasas except Vibhishana are finished. Will Vibhishana not be afraid to stay alone in Lanka?*)

On his way, the whip in the hands of the charioteer of Makaraksha fell down. (*What if it slips down? Do you have superstitious beliefs, charioteer? Nay, don't have such blind beliefs.*)

The flag on the chariot fell down. (*Whether they had tied it properly or not in a hurry!*)

Unperturbed by any number of bad omens, the Rakshasa army marched forward. (*That's it! An army ought to be like that!*)

Again, the battle started. Like the battle that had taken place between Devas and Asuras (gods and Rakshasas), this battle too went on so fiercely that bodies tingled.

The Vanaras and Rakshasas fought with each other with great enthusiasm, heroism and without rest.

They broke each other's arms and legs.

Tore each other's bellies and backs.

Strangled each other's throats.

Pierced each other's chests.

Broke each other's heads.

Vomited blood and made others vomit blood.

In this fierce battle the Rakshasas had gained the upper hand.

Unable to withstand the attack, the Vanaras began to flee.

Playing the string of the bow, Rama rushed toward Makaraksha. (*Now? Relaxing till now?*)

"You are the wicked man who killed my

father. On seeing you, my anger is boundless. I have got you after so long a time. Now you will go to Yama's world and meet those whom you have killed. Why so many words? Whether you fight with swords, arrows or box. Do what you like! Come on for the battle! All will watch how each of us fight" said Makaraksha to Rama. (*Why don't we see? Go ahead!*)

In response to Makaraksha's words, Rama laughed ironically. (*Does Rama also know laughing? We have never seen it before!*) "Why do you prattle? Does battle take place merely with words? What do you think of me? (*He does not know what you are. He is thinking that you are a great warrior.*) I killed 14 thousand people in Dandakaranya, do you know? Wicked fellow! See, I will cut your flesh into many pieces and throw it to crows and eagles!" Rama roared.

Makaraksha's body burnt with anger. (*Yes, if it does not burn, it cannot be a body at all.*) He shot arrow after arrow at Rama. (*Rakshasas alone paw the ground for quarrel. It is a pity that people in Rama's group do not know about any sin.*)

Do you have to say that Sri Rama broke and retaliated all the arrows of Makaraksha? The sounds of bows echoed like thunders. Rama and Makaraksha fought excelling each other. They broke each other's arrows.

With a view to watch this battle — gods, sages, Kinnaras, Kimpurushas, Uragas, Nagas — every body gathered in groups in the sky. (*It seems people there do not wage battles! They always watch battles 'as if their face is swelled with desire' to see the battles.*)

Due to the rain of arrows which Rama and Makaraksha were showering on each other, all directions, corners, ups, downs and every thing is closed. (*Pity! How can those in the sky see all that?*)

Rama could break the bow of Makaraksha and felled his charioteer with eight arrows.(*Oh, I see! Not with one arrow? He had to shoot eight arrows?*) Shooting some more arrows, he could kill the chariot and horses.

Jumping from the chariot, Makaraksha threw a spear on to Rama.

All right! As Rama hit it with arrows, it broke into pieces and scattered in all the directions like comets. (*What a slight opinion that the poet has about comets!*)

Tightening the fists, Makaraksha rushed towards Rama.

Rama laughed sarcastically with Agneeyastra.....!

Makaraksha fell on the ground and died.

Those in the sky appreciated Rama in many areas.

The Rakshasas fled into Lanka.

★ ★

Hearing that Makaraksha had died, Ravana became Rudra with anger. He called Indrajit and ordered, "Go to the battle at once! For you, who defeated Indra, how big is Rama? (*Even if he did not defeat Indra, how big is Rama?*) Go quickly! (*Die Quickly!*)

Indrajit offered oblations in the fire. He sacrificed a black goat. The flames circumambulated without smoke and indicated victory. The god of fire came in person and received the sacrificial offering. (*Why, then, the gods do not come directly and receive the offerings from the present-day devotees? If they really receive so, these devotees will not offer.*)

Indrajit's chariot is ready with various weapons and flags decorated with diamonds and precious stones. Indrajit sat in the chariot and said to himself. "I will kill Rama and Lakshmana, who came in the false guise of sages to the forest, and make my father happy." Saying so, he flew into the sky and disappeared.

The battle began again! Indrajit showered arrows on Rama and Lakshmana.

Rama and Lakshmana too shot arrows towards the sky. With that rain of arrows the entire sky was covered and it became utter dark.

Neither the sound of Indrajit's bow, nor the noise of the hooves of horses or the sounds of chariot wheels were heard in the sky. (*What do they touch with in the sky and make noise?*)

Like the battle between the sky and earth, the battle of arrows is fierce. With the blows of arrows of Indrajit, the Vanaras fell to the ground. Rama and Lakshmana bled and turned into blossomed Modugu trees. But, not even a single arrow of Rama touched Indrajit. (*This is a tactic to appear as if the poet is honestly describing the enemies. Initially, saying that the enemy had the upper hand! Because any way we are going to defeat them later!*)

Lakshmana got very angry because he was unable to defeat Indrajit. "Let us kill all the Rakshasas using Brahma's arrow", he said.

Rama said calmly, "O great warrior! It is unjust to kill every body just because one person has done a wrong thing. It is not just to kill those who do not fight, who have hidden, who request us to spare them, who flee away and who are absent minded. (*Is it justified to preach sermons whenever there is little or no opportunity? What about the large scale massacre that took place in the burning of Lanka, O moralist?*) We have to kill only Indrajit.[413]

Can Indrajit live if the Vanaras see him? I will shoot him down with the blows of my arrow even if he hides in the nether world (*but you said that you should not kill those who hide? You forgot so quickly!*) or even if he flies into the sky (*now he is in the sky!*)" Rama looked in all directions.

Indrajit suddenly went into Lanka again. He created a fake Sita, sat her in the chariot and came to the west gate so that all could see her.

Hanuman angrily routed a big mountain, jumped over Indrajit and saw Sita in the chariot.

The same Sita whom he had seen in Asoka vana! The spoiled sari. No ornaments. She was wailing, "Rama! Rama!" She sat on a thigh of Indrajit.

"Why has he brought Sita here?" Hanuman was surprised.

While all the Vanaras were looking, Indrajit held Sita's hair and thrashed her.

Hanuman could not control his anger. "You wicked fellow! You have held Sita's hair since death has approached you. What is the use even if you were born in the family of Brahmarshi? You have acquired Rakshasa character since you were born to a Rakshasa woman.[414]

Why have you resorted to this sin? What harm did Sita do to you? Fool! Wicked man! Cruel fellow! If you kill Sita, you will die at my hands. All the worlds where killers of women go are waiting for you." Hanuman went towards Indrajit along with the Vanara army.

The Rakshasa army stopped the Vanara army. Indrajit said to Hanuman, "I will leave Sita for you! I will kill her right now. Later, I will kill all of you and even Vibhishana. Who told you it is a great sin to kill a woman? (*Who tells? Rama might have said so.*) We can do anything that causes sorrow to the enemy." Saying so, he furiously took out the sword, cut Sita's shoulder with one stroke and roared like a lion with joy.

As soon as Indrajit slayed Sita, all the Vanaras began to flee out of fear.

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[413] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 80, slokas 37 & 40:** "Lakshmana, who was extremely angry, told Rama to use Brahma's arrow to kill all the Rakshasas."

".......Rama said as follows: It is not appropriate to kill all the Rakshasas living on the earth in response to the offence committed by one person. It is not right to kill those who do not fight, who hide, who seek refuge and who flee."

The entire troops of the enemy in the battle field are those who fight, aren't they? Who are people who do not fight but remain in the battle field? Rama has an obsession to preach great sermons always!

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[414] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 81, sloka 19:**

While abusing Indrajit, Hanuman said, "You were born to the vagina of a Rakshasa". There are some more occasions on which this expression is used while abusing Rakshasas.

Some upper caste people abuse, "Hey, you were born to the.... of a *Mala* woman!...... to the .... of a *Madiga* man!" It is also the same kind of abuse. It does not cease to be an abuse simply because it is uttered in Sanskrit.

★

Hanuman shouted at them from behind. "Are you fleeing from the battle field? Are you not ashamed? Don't you have a man's courage?" He inspired manliness, called them back and attacked Indrajit.

Again a fierce battle took place. Hanuman threw a huge mountain on Indrajit.

Though the charioteer of Indrajit skilfully saved the chariot but many Rakshasas fell under that mountain and died.

After fighting for some time, Hanuman said to Vanaras. "Let us tell Rama and Sugriva about Sita's death and do as per their instructions. Let us suspend fighting for the present. He stopped fighting and started for the spot where Rama was.

After Vanaras stopped the battle and left, Indrajit went to the temple Nikumbhila to perform fire offering. (*Homam*)

There he performed a sacrifice. The fire, which was satisfied with the offering, shone with flames. Some Rakshasas were carefully supervising the smooth performance of all the steps in the sacrifice.

Before Hanuman stopped the battle, Rama heard the clamour from the battle field and called Jambavan. "Hanuman is fighting very courageously. Go with troops and help him (*I will relax here!*)"

While Jambavan was coming to the west gate along with the army of bears, Hanuman came that way, diverted them back to the north gate. He went to Rama and narrated the whole thing sadly. "Rama! While we were fighting, Indrajit brought Sita and killed her. We came here to tell you this sad news."

Rama at once fell down and fainted. Lakshmana sat grieving near his brother and began a discourse on what is *Dharma* (righteousness, virtue, justice, goodness and so on) and what is *Adharma* (opposite of Dharma). "Alas! What difficulty has befallen you! You have always followed Dharma. You have always treated pleasure and pain equally. Your Dharma could not prevent difficulties for you. Though people always talk of Dharma, where is it? If at all there is Dharma, would difficulty befall you — who followed Dharma? (*Lakshmana! Perhaps it was not Dharma that your brother followed!*) Ravana, who is a wicked man, is happy. However righteous a man you are, you are facing difficulties.

Only bad people are living happily. Those who follow Dharma do not have any happiness. Moreover, they face every hardship. Dharma should yield good fruits and Adharma should yield bad results. But does it happen so?

If people who follow Dharma are happy and those who follow the wrong path are unhappy, then we can believe that Dharma and Adharma will get appropriate fruits. If it does not happen so, how can we believe that Dharma is correct?

Why didn't you defy our father who followed the untruthful path by violating his promise that he would crown you? If you assist an untruthful act, you will also become an untruthful man, won't you? (*The poet is concluding that Dasaratha's action was 'untruthfulness'. It will be nice if we know where king Dasaratha is: in heaven or hell? The agony that they could not get the kingdom is always pricking these brothers.*)

One should follow whatever is necessary at a given point of time. Whether it is Dharma or Adharma!

You had abandoned all the riches and wealth. (*While people are saying that Indrajit killed Sita, should he discuss whether wealth is necessary or not?*) A wealthy person is a great man, good man, pundit and what not? A wealthy man is rich in all good qualities. You will get fame and reputation only due to wealth. We fulfil all our wishes due to wealth. We can live proudly amidst others. Even if we get angry, others will tolerate it. If we observe patience (When we possess wealth), we get fame. Any quality will shine if we possess wealth. (*It does not appear base and bad to Lakshmana — that is to the poet — to give so much importance to wealth! He is saying that one should possess wealth since it is the way in which world exists and wealth has so much importance in the world. He argues that one should earn wealth and enjoy all pleasures which it fetches — even if it is through Adharma.*)

Once you reject wealth, it is not easy to earn wealth again. One has to resort sinful activities. (*This means, it is not possible to earn wealth without resorting to sinful activities! The presence of wealth implies that the wealth is acquired due to sinful activities.*)

Firstly it is wrong to lose wealth. I do not understand why you gave up the kingdom. (*Talking about the remote happening now? Lakshmana! Had your brother revolted against your father and forcefully occupied the throne, who would have written' Ramayana'? How would both of you have gathered tons of this fame?*)

Abandoning wealth and relying on Dharma, whose existence is uncertain, what happiness did you get? (*How persistently the poet is complaining that Rama had not seized the throne!*) What did you attain by following father's command? Except that you have faced many hardships....(*What about you Lakshmana? Instead of staying back at Ayodhya and enjoying pleasures, why did you come to forest relying on the duty to serve the elder brother, whose existence is uncertain?*)

"O best among men! Realise that you are a god! Indrajit caused you a lot of agony. I will remove your agony. I spoke all this out of my sorrow that Sita has died. Now, I will destroy Lanka? Lakshmana wept valorously.[415]

Meanwhile an elephant-like valorous man Vibhishana came with his followers (*four elephants!*)

He saw the wailing Lakshmana, Vanaras and Rama — who was lying on Lakshmana's thigh. He asked, 'What is the matter?' (*This elephant-like valorous man does not know what the matter is! Where was he wandering all the while?*) Vanaras told him that Indrajit killed Sita.

Vibhishana gave courage to Rama. "Indrajit killing Sita will never happen. (*It has already happened, isn't it?*) It is like the drying up of a sea. (*Rama said many times that he would dry up the sea with his arrows, didn't he?*) Ravana has unlimited infatuation for Sita. Will he accept to kill such a Sita? Indrajit has played some trick. Rama! Set aside your grief! (*Get up and do work!*)

Indrajit went to the Temple Nikumbhila. (*How do you know about it? Did Indrajit tell Vanaras while going there?*)

If Indrajit returns after performing oblation to fire, it is not possible for any one to kill him. Moreover, then death of all of us is certain. Rama! Send Lakshmana along with me right now to kill Indrajit. You stay back here. Brahma has said to Indrajit, "Whoever prevents you from going to Nikumbhila and completing the *oblation to fire*, that man will kill you."

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[415] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 83, slokas 14 to 44:** We have seen above what Lakshmana said to Rama who lay down in sorrow. Some of them are the following: "It is good if man does things as he wishes." This means, one can do as he wishes. He need not think that Dharma and Adharma exist. How does a man wish or not wish some thing? The same society, which ordains some thing as Dharma or Adharma, will also ordain, "You ought to wish this, you ought not to wish that". We adopt Dharma — which the society ordains — as our wish. We try to give up with dislike, which is not ordained by society as Dharma. To behave in accordance with one's own wishes means behaving in accordance with the Dharma and Adharma of society.

" One who has wealth is a man." (*This means who does not possess wealth is equal to woman. An incapable person.*)

"One who possesses wealth is a pundit" (*One who does not possess wealth will not have recognition however highly educated he may be. If he possesses wealth, he is a scholar even if he is an uneducated man!*)

"One who possesses wealth is a famous man. Good man. Rich with all good qualities." (*Let him do any number of base acts, if he is a wealthy man, all his base qualities will turn into good qualities. Obsession for women will become romanticism. If he plunders, it will be valour. If he commits murders, it will be punishing the wicked. Thus, the meanings change if one has wealth.*)★

Therefore, we have to prevent Indrajit from doing oblation to fire. If Indrajit dies, you can assume that Ravana is dead. Rama! If you grieve, I too will grieve. (*Okay, you too grieve! Assist Rama in grieving!*) First we have to prevent Indrajit's sacrifice and then kill him. Do not delay anymore. Tell Lakshmana to come with me. (*Every time, Vibhishana tells secrets such as these to Rama. Had Vibhishana not joined Rama's camp and remained in Lanka, could Rama have conquered Lanka?*)

After hearing what Vibhishana said, Rama slowly got up from Lakshmana's thigh. "Vibhishana! Indrajit is a great valorous man. (*It seems he realised this fact!*) He knows how to use the *Brahmaastra*. He knows all the miracles (*You too know them, don't you? Scaring seas, threatening mountains and so on!*) If he flies in the sky, we do not know where he flies. (*Perhaps he ought to tell you where he flies, before he begins to fly!*) Lakshmana! Go at once along with Hanuman, Jambavan and the troops! Vibhishana will take you. Go and kill Indrajit. (*Sugriva and I will sit here chatting!*)", Rama ordered Lakshmana.

(*Lakshmana must be feeling relieved as Rama got up from his thigh which was numb!*)

Lakshmana bowed at the feet of Rama. "My great arrows will hit Indrajit, pierce him and will fall on Lanka", saying so he started off. (*After hearing that Indrajit had killed Sita, Rama had fainted, hadn't he? But after regaining consciousness, he lay down listening to Lakshmana's sermons of wealth not grieving for Sita. Why had Rama, who wailed every moment for Sita romantically, had kept quiet even after hearing that Sita had died.*)

Vibhishana took every one to the spot where Indrajit was.

The battle between the Rakshasas and Vanaras began again.

Hanuman was at the height of his valour and began to kill the Rakshasas.

Indrajit got up from the sacrificial altar before the ritual was completed. He asked his charioteer to drive the chariot towards Hanuman. He began fighting by throwing swords, axes and many kinds of weapons at him.

(*After this, the story went backwards again and returned.*)

Vibhishana took Lakshmana to the garden Nikumbhila and showed the fire place of sacrifice. "Look there! Look at that Banyan tree! Indrajit will offer sacrifice, complete the oblation to fire and come back for the battle. We have to prevent Indrajit from going under the Banyan tree. Kill him at once." Vibhishana hurried.

Lakshmana went close to Indrajit and said, "I am calling you for the combat, come on!"

Indrajit realised every thing. He saw Vibhishana. "O wicked fellow! Being my paternal uncle, you have resorted to such betrayal. You do not have morality. You do not have race. (*najaati = no race. This means, 'you have left the race!'*) You do not have courtesy. No affection. No righteous thinking. Leaving your kinsmen, you are living like a servant for the enemy. (*The poet used the word 'bhrtyaha'*) You were unable to make a distinction between your own people and others.

Even if the enemy possesses good qualities and kinsmen lacks good qualities, we get help from the kinsmen and we never get help from the enemy. (*The poet describes as if Indrajit is also considering that Rama possesses good qualities and Ravana lacks good qualities!*)

An enemy is an enemy always. He will make use of you for his needs, finish his task and later conquer you. Unable to grasp this motive, you joined the enemy camp and resorted to such vileness, you base fellow!" Indrajit said disgustedly.

Vibhishana turned eyes red in anger. "Why do you prattle arrogantly? Don't speak without respect for the paternal uncle. (*Indrajit! Respectfully salute your paternal uncle who came to kill you!*) Although I was born in Rakshasa race, which resorts to wicked acts, I am not a wicked man. I have not harassed anybody. I have not betrayed any one. Being my sibling Ravana banished me. Was it not wrong? (*Would he not have met Rama if he was not banished?*)

Ravana is a wicked man who steals others' wealth and wives. He always commits sins.

Killing sages, fighting with gods, having hostility with others, not wishing others' welfare — all are bad qualities. What is wrong in leaving such a man? What is wrong in throwing away poison from one's hand to be happy? (*Is it poison in fact? It may be a medicine. As you do not like to swallow the medicine, you might have thrown the medicine and now saying, "I threw it since it is poison?"*)

Ravana is a wicked man who suspects friends. He suspected and banished me. You are an arrogant fellow. A proud fellow. You do not have sense of courage. You are prattling as you like. *Ropes of Yama* are ready for you. Now death has approached you. First fight with this great man. (*Later, you can fight with the 'elder' great man!*) You can pray to the god of your choice in Yama's world" He provoked sarcastically.[416]

Unable to control his anger, Indrajit started to fight and looked at Lakshmana. "Don't you remember the taste of my arrows? All of you fainted one after the other. Have you forgotten? You have come again?"

"Why do you boast? Show your valour. (*Perhaps, he must make Lakshmana once again fall on his own face!*) It is not a great thing to fight stealthily like a thief. A warrior will not do that. (*Lakshmana! Show your face once. What did your brother do in the case of Vali? Was it a stealthy act or valorous act?*) You say you made us faint with your arrows. Why do you talk about the past thing? Now show your valour", said Lakshmana.

Indrajit angrily released arrows and as soon as they hit Lakshmana, he said, "Why this arrogance? (*They have not hit me.*) You are unnecessarily boasting. I will kill you, without boasting and talking harshly like you, see", Lakshmana released five arrows. (*So, he will kill smoothly!*)

Indrajit threw three arrows. A great battle took place between the two. Such a battle had not taken place on this earth until then. (*What? A great war with five arrows and three arrows? It is a shame to talk like that!*) The battle took place so greatly that we can't describe it.

(*Again, Indrajit and Lakshmana have to come and demonstrate it!*)

The gleam on Indrajit's face diminished a little.

Vibhishana said to Lakshmana, "The gleam on Indrajit's face has diminished. Now, it will not take much time. Kill him quickly." He encouraged.

Lakshmana showered a rain of arrows enthusiastically on Indrajit.

Indrajit's shield was broken.

Both of them fought beautifully, surprisingly, skilfully and fiercely.

Both of them bled and appeared like blossomed *Burugu* trees and like mountains on which streams flowed. (*The poet likes so much to describe blood and violence.*)

Vibhishana's followers too fought heroically and destroyed the Rakshasa army. (*Enthusiasm*

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416. Yuddha kanda, sarga 87, sloka 19 to 30: Vibhishana's reply to Indrajit: "Rakshasa! Wicked fellow! You are barking like this without knowing my character. I am your paternal uncle and deserve to be respected. Don't talk harsh words. I was born in the Rakshasa race that is engaged in sinful activities. Yet my nature is not cruel. I have the character of good people. I do not like to use violence on others. (*I like getting people killed.*) Killing sages, waging fierce battles with all gods, anger, hostility, opposition — these are Ravana's faults. Because of these faults, I left Ravana.

(*Against whom did Ravana wage battles? Against his enemies! Sages and gods are his enemies. What will a person do instead of being angry, having opposition and fight against the enemies? Is Rama not fighting battles against his enemies?*)

"Rakshasa! You are a fool. Senseless fellow….. You and your father will be destroyed. Now you cannot perform fire oblation. You cannot live rejecting Rama and Lakshmana. You may pray to the god of your choice in *Yama's world* after being killed. Now you cannot do anything." (*This is like saying, "Hey, what can you do to me?"*)

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that they will get ministership tomorrow!)

Roaming amidst Vanara troops, Vibhishana shouted so much that the troops went mad with the battle frenzy. "Except this Indrajit, Ravana does not have any strength. If we kill him, it is like defeating Ravana. You have killed many warriors like Prahasta, Kumbhakarna, Dhumraksha, Jambumalini, Kumbha, Nikumbha, Naranta and Devanta. What is great about Indrajit? You have to show your valour now. If you kill him, it will be the end of this battle. I would have killed Indrajit but I am hesitating that it may not look nice if I kill him since I am his paternal uncle. But, I will do any thing for the sake of Sri Rama. I feel sad if I think of killing Indrajit. That is why I will not kill him. Lakshmana will kill him. All of you must show more enthusiasm!" The Vanara army swung with battle cry while Vibhishana was encouraging them.[417]

Again fierce battle took place. People of both sides fought equally well. It is difficult to know who will be victorious. All the corners are closing with the rain of arrows.

Rivers of blood are flowing. Gods in the sky were scared and stood at a distance. (*Is it because arrows will hit them?*)

After some time Lakshmana cut off the head of the charioteer of Indrajit. Driving his chariot for himself, Indrajit fought . This, Sri Rama alone can do.

Four Vanaras flew into the sky, pounced on the horses of Indrajit's chariot and broke the chariot.

Indrajit came out of the chariot and said to the Rakshasas, "I will go to Lanka and get another chariot. Without letting the enemies know that I am not here, stop the enemies from advancing." And he started for Lanka. (*Do you have to go yourself and get a chariot? Stay here and send some one. If you are so foolish, how will you win?*)

Indrajit soon returned from Lanka with a chariot, full of weapons. (*So, he is a clever guy!*)

Again a fierce battle took place. Again Lakshmana broke Indrajit's bow.

Indrajit took out another bow and fixed the string. Lakshmana broke that also. Indrajit took yet another bow and showered arrows.

Without letting those arrows fall on him, Lakshmana scattered them and cut off the head of the second charioteer whom Indrajit had brought with him.

Indrajit angrily shot three arrows at the face of Vibhishana (*Only three? Indrajit, do you have so little anger at Vibhishana?*)

Vibhishana hit Indrajit's horses with his club and killed them. (*As if Vibhishana did so after Indrajit hit Vibhishana!*)

Indrajit picked up *Shakti* and hit at Vibhishana. Lakshmana broke it into pieces on its way before it hit Vibhishana.

Indrajit aimed the arrow, which Yama had given him. (*Such arrows do not work, Indrajit!*)

On seeing it, Lakshmana aimed an arrow, which Kubera had given him in a dream. (*Arrow in the dream? Stupid arrow, how will it work?*)

The two arrows dashed against each other and broke into pieces. (*See, what sort of arrow Kubera* ***threw on the face*** *of Lakshmana!*) Again, Lakshmana threw *Varunastra*. (*Who gave this arrow? Is it Varuna?*) Indrajit used *Roudrastra*. As this proved futile, he again used *Agneyastra*. Lakshmana hit it with *Sowrastra*. Indrajit picked up *Asurastra*. From that arrow: weapons, swords, axes, spears, clubs, pestle and many other weapons came out. Meanwhile, Lakshmana used *Maheswarastra* and destroyed it.

All the gods in the sky were shocked and

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417. Yuddha kanda, sarga 90, slokas 17 to 19: "…..Inspiring Vanaras, the noble Vibhishana…..said as follows at an apt moment. 'Vanaras! Why have you kept quiet? After this sinner Indrajit dies, Ravana will not have strength. All the strong Rakshasas came to the battle and died. Only this task (of killing Indrajit) is left. It is not proper on my part as a father to kill the son. (*Morals!*) Yet, for the sake of Rama I will kill my brother's son. Tears are obstructing my eyes, which wish to kill Indrajit. Lakshmana, who has strong shoulders, will kill him." ★

gathered above the head of Lakshmana in the sky. (*Get away, the arrows will strike you! What do you see here while they are killing each other?*)

All the gods including Indra were saving Lakshmana. (*Saving while sitting? Why don't they come and help? Well, is Indra not afraid of Indrajit who defeated him?*)

Lakshmana took out *Aindrastra*, which is very powerful. It had worked in Devasura battle in the past. (*It must have rusted away!*) It had great valour. Had no opposition. To such Indra's arrow, Lakshmana said, "O Indraastraa! If it is true that Sri Rama is virtuous, valorous and truthful (*Pity, he is putting Indra's arrow in a delicate situation*), you have to kill Indrajit!" So saying he used it.

It cut off the head of Indrajit along with his crown. Shining very brightly with ornaments, that head and trunk fell down and rolled on the ground. All the Rakshasas fled away. All the Vanaras clamoured with joy.

After the sinner Indrajit died, the Sun shone with great lustre. The wind blew gently. All the worlds seemed calm again. (*The poet has written lies courageously!*) Gods and Devendra too felt happy. (*It is no use if they simply felt happy. Indrajit became a martyr in the battle field. He will go to heaven and always sit beside Indra.*)

Gods, sages and Brahmins thought, "We can hereafter wander about happily". Vanaras, Gods and everybody told Sri Rama's story again and again and enjoyed themselves.

Taking the Vanara army with him, Lakshmana went to Rama, saluted and informed them about the killing of Indrajit reverently. (*'Reverently' means nothing but bowing.*)

Overwhelmed with joy, Vibhishana too described the whole thing, "Rama! How skilfully Lakshmana cut off Indrajit's head! Ah! He fought very well." **418**

All the people were at once relieved of the wounds and pains and gleamed with health.

"Ah! Indrajit has died!", all of them felt happy.

★ ★

Hearing that Indrajit had died, Ravana fainted. He got up after some time and began to grieve, "Alas! My child! Have you passed away? You defeated Indra. You broke Mandaragiri. Have you succumbed to Lakshmana? Death in the battle is a great death for great warriors. One

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418. Yuddha kanda, sarga 92, sloka 6: "Feeling happy that Lakshmana, the great, had cut off the head of Indrajit, Vibhishaṇa happily informed Rama."

Rama felt very happy, took Lakshmana close to him and sat him on his thigh. "Valorous Rama held the head of glorious Lakshmana who was feeling shy and sat him on his thigh, embraced him well, touched his body and gazed at him several times." (*This acting of love is because Lakshmana protected his reputation!*)

"Lakshmana! If Indrajit had died, it is like loss of 'right shoulder' of Ravana. Now, it amounts to my victory. (*Aham = I; vijaya = victorious — says Rama. Can't he say, 'we are victorious'! He does not like to include Lakshmana. He sat here and yet he says he is victorious!*) This task took three nights and three days. Hanuman, Jambavan, Vibhishana and every body accomplished the task valorously! (*Whereas I became victorious without doing any thing!*) Now, I will kill Ravana, who is grieving over the loss of his son." He called Sushena and ordered, "Look! Lakshmana is suffering with pain due to the sharp points of arrows. Treat him immediately. Also treat the remaining Vanaras."

(*Lakshmana! Why don't you get down from the thigh? Praising is over, isn't it? Will you sit until he pushes you off?*)

Sushena offered the smell of the herbs to Lakshmana, Vibhishana and the remaining Vanaras. (*Where are the herbs?*)

★

who dies for the sake of his lord will go to heaven.[419]

All your enemies will sleep peacefully as you are no more. But, for me, all the three worlds without you are empty. All women in the harem will wail for you. Where have you gone my child, leaving your parents, wife and Lanka? I should have passed away first and you ought to have performed the funeral rites for me. Now every thing has been reversed. While your enemy Rama is still alive, have you left me without protecting me? Along with grief, Ravana became furious. He wanted to kill Sita at once. "Indrajit created a magical illusion as if he had killed Sita; but I will really kill her", saying so Ravana took a sword and went to Asoka vana along with his wives and ministers.

On seeing Ravana who was coming to kill her with a sword, Sita began to wail. "Alas! This wicked man will kill me. He asked me to marry him and have sex with him. (*ramasya = have sex. However sad scene it may be, the poet drags it either to having sex or breasts!*) I refused. As I did not yield to him, he is now ready to kill me. He might have killed Rama and Lakshmana! Or, as he was unable to kill them, he is going to kill me out of a grudge. Alas! I did not agree when Hanuman wanted to take me with him. I could not think properly what was right and what was wrong. Had I gone on the back of Hanuman, I would have been happy with my husband now, wouldn't I? (*It is all empty talk that you would have been happy. Your husband would have become angry for you touched Hanuman. He would have said, "I will not accept you'. Then you would have repented for not having stayed back with Ravana!*)[420]

Will Kausalya live if she knew that her son died? (*If she does not live, let her go! How long will older people live? Why do you bother about her? You take care of yourself!*)

Kausalya repeatedly remembers the childhood acts and youthful acts of Rama and wails. How can she live? (*Oh! Mr. Poet, you have already written these dialogues! Ravana is now coming here with a sword!*)

Kausalya will not live any more. She will perform all the funeral rites for her sons and die by jumping into the fire. Or will jump into the water and die. (*Only these two ways? Aren't there other ways?*)

In fact, Mandhara should be blamed for causing so much agony to Kausalya" (*My goodness! Will the story turn back! Ravana... with the sword...*)

Suparshwa, a minister of Ravana, saw Sita who was wailing thus. Suparshwa is a very good person. A noble man. An intellectual. (*If the poet praises Suparshwa like this, we can guess that he is going to act favourably to Rama!*)

This minister objected to Ravana's action. "*Dasagriva!* (Man of ten necks!) Why do you think of killing Sita unnecessarily? You are acquainted with Vedic education. Is it not sin to kill a woman? Sita is a beautiful woman. You

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419. Yuddha kanda, sarga 93, slokas 9 & 10:

Ravana's words: This is the right way for the death of a person who fights well....One who lays down his life for the sake of his master will go to heaven."

In respect of preaching the sermon that soldiers and servants will attain heaven if they lay down their lives for the sake of their masters — Rama and Ravana are identical. There is no ifference between them.

★

420. Yuddha kanda, sarga 93, slokas 54 & 55:

Observe Sita's sadness. "As a mean person, I did not follow Hanuman's advice. Had I — as a oble woman — sat on the back of Hanuman and gone with him, I would have been sat on the high of my husband by now and would not have wailed like this."

Sita, then, said that it was not the feature of a devoted wife to sit on the back of Hanuman and er husband alone ought to rescue her, didn't she? That argument has now changed! Can a devoted ife, afraid of her life, talk like this?

★

show all your anger on Rama. Today it is *Krishana paksha chaturdasi*. Tomorrow is *Amavasya*. If you kill Rama by tomorrow, you will get Sita!", he preached to Ravana.

On the advice of Suparshva, Ravana gave up the idea of killing Sita and left for his assembly.[421]

Ravana sat on the throne with anger and grief. Looking at all the great warriors, he said, "All of you start for the battle. Go with chariots, elephants and horses and shower a rain of arrows just as the clouds of the rainy season rain and kill Rama. If you cannot kill him today, I will kill Rama with my sharp arrows tomorrow. (swaha = tomorrow; vihamtasmi = I will kill).

Again, crores of soldiers started for the battle.

The battle began in the morning. Arrows of Rakshasas X Mountains of Vanaras; trees X spears; trees X swords; mountains X parighas; trees X clubs; pattasas X trees; clubs X trees; swords X trees.

(*Don't feel irritated! That battle had happened like this!*)

The Rakshasas gained upper hand.

Vanaras went to Sri Rama and sought refuge. Then Rama, unable to control his anger, started for the battle. (*Otherwise, he would not have entered the arena.*)

To describe the battle of Sri Rama, even Adiseshu with thousand tongues is also enough. (*Why? The poet with a single tongue is enough.*)

A rain of arrows that is closing all the corners of the world.

None of the Rakshasas was able to go close to Rama. In fact they are not able to see him with their eyes. Rama scattered the enemy troops with arrows like flames of fire. He slayed some horizontally. Some vertically. He burnt some. He insulted some....some....some...!

The Rakshasa troops were scared, suspected each co-Rakshasa as a Rama and they began to kill each other.

Rama threw a *Gaandharvaastra*. All the Rakshasas lost the balance of their mind and were misled by it. The entire battle appeared to be full of Rama. Wherever they looked, they found Rama. Thousands of Ramas. Lakhs of Ramas!

(*With one Rama, we got such a 'confusing-Ramayana', if it is thousands... lakhs of Ramas?*)

In all directions, Rakshasas saw many Ramas. Again the next moment they were not able to see the same Rama. (*Rakshasas might have believed many gods at the beginning. Later, they might have believed only one god, thinking that all gods were the same. Thereafter they realised the truth and stopped believing even that one god!*)

The Rakshasas were able to see Sri Rama's bow rotating with wheels of bright light throughout the battle field like a rotating fire brand.

On that day, during seven moments, Sri Rama, with his arrows like flames of fire destroyed.

7, 29, 00, 000 High speed chariots.
13, 12, 20, 000 Fat elephants.
10, 20, 60, 000 Horses.
145, 80, 00, 000 Rakshasa warriors who could assume any form they wanted.[422]

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421. A question arises, Although Ravana faced a terrible loss due to enemies, although he lost his sons and brothers and although his vengeance against his enemies increased, would he stop killing Sita?' Hence the poet described as if Ravana wanted to kill Sita. But, as the story does not proceed if Sita dies, the poet stopped that act. But, because of this, Ravana has become somebody who did not kill a woman and a nice person who heeds good words, doesn't he? ★

422. Yuddha kanda, sarga 94, slokas 31 to 33: All these calculations are myths. Yet let us see how they are. The calculations regarding Rama's battle are as follows.

Aniikam dasa sahasram radhaanaam = 10 thousand aniikaas of chariots;
astaadasa sahasraani kunjaraanam = 18 thousand aniikaas of elephants; ➔

Apart from the dead, the surviving Rakshasas fled the battle field.

The battle field turned into a dancing place of Rudra.

Gods and sages in the sky praised Sri Rama, "Well done! Well done!"

To Sugriva, Vibhishana, Hanuman, Jambavan and others, Sri Rama said, "Only Rudra and I possess such a great power of weapons. None else has it." He said the actual truth. (*Why do you include Rudra? Rama, it will be nice if you alone have that power! Who will deny if you say, "Only I possess so much strength? Even Rudra does not have it!"*)

★ ★

Rakshasa women in Lanka gathered in groups and wailing wherever they were. All of them had lost their husbands, fathers, sons, siblings or relatives. (*Observe, how these grieving women too praise Rama and Vibhishana!*)

"The old jealous Surpanakha — why did she go — with her suspended pot-like belly —

➔ *chaturdasa sahasraani vaajiinaam* = 14 thousand aniikaas of horses;
puurneesata sahasreedwee raakshasaanaam = 2 full lakhs of aniikaas of Rakshasas.

In this manner, Rama fought in accordance with good rhyme and rules of poetry, said the poet. But we will be able to understand the valour of Rama only if we know what 'aniikam' is. The poet did not explain what and how much '*aniikam*' is! But all the translations calculated aniikam as 7290 and described Rama's fighting in terms of these calculations only.

I have drawn all the details concerning 'aniikam' from the translation of *Ramayana* by Chadalavada Sundara Rama Sastrulu. (*Sundara Rama Sastrulu, Chadalavaada. 'Sri Madramayanam. Yuddha kandam'. Prati padaarthra Tiikaa taatparya sahitam. Chennapuri: Saradamba Vilas Mudraakshara saala, 1897.*)

In order to know how brainless and crazy these calculations are, we have to see all the following details. We do not find any use — even of a small straw. But, we can understand how stupid the pundits of religious texts are. We will have only this much use.

1 elephant, 1 chariot, 3 horses and 5 soldiers taken together will be one 'patti', the pundits say.

1 patti means a band of 10 items.

3 pattis = 1 seenaa mukha	30
3 seenaa mukhaas = 1 gulmam	90
3 gulmaas = 1 gana	270
3 ganaas = 1 vaahini	810
3 vaahinis = 1 pruttina	2430
3 pruttina = 1 chamuvu	7290.

'Chamuvu' means 'aniikam'. Which means, aniikam = 7290.

If we see separately the number of chariots, horses and elephants in each aniikam:

elephants — 729, chariots — 729, horses — 2187, soldiers — 3645.

All these taken together make one Aniikam, don't they? Then why should they say that Rama felled 10 thousand aniikaas of chariots? The translators, without raising any question, multiplied aniikam (that is 7290) with 10 thousands and wrote: 'Rama fell 7 crores, 29 lakhs of chariots. Are all of them chariots? They include horses, elephants, soldiers and every thing. Without any question, pundits translated *like a blind bull entering the field.*

The poet did not say what 'aniikam' is. The interpretation of these translators is not coherent. Therefore, when the poet says, 'Rama felled ten thousand aniikaas of chariots', we should not give any calculation!

★

to Rama who is like a *Manmadha*, god of love? (*Why does she go? Because he was like Manmadha!*) That senseless, base woman committed a vile act condemned by all people. It is only because of Surpanakha that hostility between Ravana and Rama began. Ravana brought Sita for the ruin of the Rakshasas. Ravana will also meet the same fate as Viradha for desiring Sita.

Sri Rama is a great man. A virtuous man. A rich in good qualities. He killed fourteen thousand cruel Rakshasas in Janasthana. (*Still fanciful recollection of Janasthana? A while ago, he killed crores of 'aniikaas' of Rakshasas, hasn't he? Do you think that a thousand is more than a crore? Lanka women! Are you not literate?*)

Did Rama not kill the very base fellow Kabandha? Did he not kill the very strong Vali and rescue Sugriva? However virtuous words Vibhishana said, this wicked man (Ravana) did not heed them. Had he heeded Vibhishana's advice, would Lanka had turned into a grave yard like this? (*It would not have turned into a grave yard. But, it would have become a slave state more horrible than a grave yard if Ravana had agreed for a truce!*)

Though Kumbhakarna died and Indrajit died, Ravana being a stupid fellow, could not understand Sri Rama's influence."

"Alas! My son has passed away"

"My husband has passed away"

"My son has died"

"This Sri Rama may be Sri Mahavishnu. May be a Rudra. May be Indra." (*Maybe these Lanka people do not have shame. They do not have self respect. They do not have sense. What is all this praise even if the enemy has tortured them so much? A big blunder in this story is that no character has an appropriate behaviour. All the enemies eulogise Rama! Ravana too refers to Rama as a 'great man'. There is no portrayal in accordance with the nature of the character.*)

In the past, when Ravana was harassing all the worlds, gods performed '*tapas*' (penance). Then Brahma consoled them. "Hereafter you need not worry. The Rakshasas themselves will be afraid. Because, in the past some gods, along with Indra, went to Rudra and sought his refuge. Then Rudra told them, 'O gods! A woman who will destroy Rakshasas will be born in order to do good to you." (*Here the scene ends abruptly. Again, wailing of Lanka women continues.*)

"Just as hunger destroyed the Rakshasas in the past, this Sita, whom the gods have sent, will destroy us. Ravana is a wicked man. Death is inevitable to us. Who can save us from the valour of Sri Rama. Vibhishana has done a good thing. He realised who would cause danger and sought refuge in that person. He is safe" — Thus, the Rakshasa women wailed.

★ ★

Ravana heard the wailing of the women in every house. He sighed deeply, felt sad, became furious. "Ask Mahidhara, Mahaparshva and Virupaksha to get ready for the battle along with the troops", he roared. "Now, see what I will do. I will send Rama and Lakshmana to Yama's world with my sharp arrows, which are like deadly fire! Just as elephants trample and destroy water ponds, I will destroy the Vanaras, who are great warriors. I will fell down the Vanaras who are great warriors with each arrow. The earth will not be seen, as it will be covered with dead bodies of the Vanaras. With the rain of my arrows, all the horizons will be closed. (*We do not know about your rain of arrows but you are showering rain of words well. It seems Rama and you have studied in the same school! Your teachers taught you to prattle well!*)

Destroying the enemies, I will redeem all our people who have died in the battle. I will wipe the tears of the women who are grieving in Lanka.

Keep my chariot ready. Give my bow. Let all Rakshasas in Lanka come along with me to the battle", he ordered.

All the commanders went to each and every house and called every body. "Come for the battle. We have to destroy the enemies. Come for the battle!"

The next moment all people came in crowds enthusiastically and brought whatever weapons they had. The army assembled with vertical swords, horizontal swords, spears, clubs, wheels, Shaktis, pestles, iron rods, thorny sticks, bamboo sticks, axes, *Mudgaras, Pattasas, Bandivalas* and many more weapons.

Ravana got into a chariot with eight horses.

The troops moved forward with great enthusiasm.

All the bad omens appeared on their way without fail. The sun diminished in his light. All the horizons became dark. All the birds cried out unpleasantly. The animals moved in reverse order. All the horses hesitated to move forward. A vulture sat on Ravana's chariot. Ravana's left eye and left shoulder trembled. The gleam on his face diminished. A comet fell down. Blood rained from the sky. Many bad omens indicating Ravana's death appeared. Yet Ravana ignored them. (*Otherwise, will he be upset like Rama? No!*) and moved forward.

Again a great battle began. "Come on! Come on!" The Vanaras and Rakshasas called out to each other for the battle. They fought hard.

Due to Ravana's rain of arrows the Vanara troops fell to the ground in large numbers. The heaps of dead bodies increased: with hands, feet, necks, heads and hearts broken.

Holding a huge tree, Sugriva acted ferociously in the battle field. He rained mountains on the enemy.

On seeing the ruin of the Rakshasa troops, Virupaksha got down from the chariot, climbed an elephant and said, "Do you know who I am? I am Virupaksha!" Saying so, he began to fight with Sugriva and drowned him with rain of arrows.

Sugriva brought a huge tree and hit it on the head of the elephant on which Virupaksha sat. It cried, went back, fell on the ground and died. When Virupaksha picked up a sword and a shield and was about to attack Sugriva, Sugriva routed a big mountain and threw it on Virupaksha. Virupaksha escaped from it and hit Sugriva with the sword. Sugriva fainted for a while, got up and hit Virupaksha with his fist. Virupaksha tore the shield of Sugriva with his sword, kicked Sugriva at once and threw him up. (*This warrior is excellent. I like him. Sugriva got at least one kick!*)

Sugriva fell down, got up and slapped Virupaksha with his palm. Virupaksha gave Sugriva a blow. Sugriva again hit Virupaksha on his eyebrows. Virupaksha fell to the ground, vomited blood; his looks turned ugly, convulsed with pain and lost his life.

On hearing of the death of Virupaksha, Ravana grieved and called Mahodara. "All my hopes are on you for my victory. The time has come for you to serve me since I have looked after you all these years", said Ravana.

Mahodara agreed and started off for the battle.

Again a fierce battle took place. Unable to withstand the attacks of Mahodara, the Vanaras ran away to Sugriva.

Sugriva routed a big mountain and threw it on Mahodara. It turned into powder due to Mahodara's arrows.

Again, Sala tree turned into powder!

Looking from side to side, Sugriva picked up *Parigha* (*He realised that a weapon is greater than a mountain*), hit Mahodara's horses with it and killed them. Mahodara held a club and jumped from the chariot.

The two combated with each other with weapons.

Parigha and club dashed against each other and the two broke.

Again looking from side to side, Sugriva picked up an iron pestle with gold rings.

Mahodara took another club. Again the two broke.

(*From which country did Ravana import these nasty weapons!*)

Both of them began boxing. (*That's it! Why the hell they did not start it at the beginning itself?*) They slapped each other. Gave blows to each other. Hit each other with their shoulders. Pushed each other. Lifted each other and smashed each other on the ground. They moved round and round in order to get a hold on each other.

Looking around, Mahodara picked up a sword. Sugriva also took another sword. A fierce duel took place. Mahodara's sword stuck into the shield of Sugriva. While Mahodara was trying to remove his sword from Sugriva's shield, Sugriva brandished his sword and cut off Mahodara's head. It fell to the ground brightly shining with the crown and ear rings!

The Rakshasa troops fled away.

After Mahodara died, Mahaparshva angrily went towards Angada. He scattered the Vanara troops with a rain of arrows.

Angada angrily took out a 'parigha' and threw it on Mahaparshva. It hit Mahaparshva's chariot and the chariot collapsed. Jambavan and Gavaksha routed huge mountains and threw them on the horses, which were still alive and killed them.

Mahaparshva showered a rain of arrows on all the Vanara warriors. Angada rotated the Parigha in his hand and hit Mahaparshva with it. His bow and crown fell down. Meanwhile, Angada went to Mahaparshva and punched him on his ears with his fist, which was like Indra's weapon (*Vajraayudha*). Mahaparshva tried to hit on the left shoulder of Angada with a mountain like axe. Angada escaped skilfully and hit Mahaparshva on his chest. But Mahaparshva (*due to lack of skill*) could not escape the blow of Angada, fell on the ground and lost his life.

The Rakshasas were scared and ran to Ravana.

The gods and the Vanaras felt happy.

★ ★

On hearing of Mahaparshva's death, Ravana became very furious. "Charioteer! I will destroy from the roots Rama's tree that has a fruit called Sita and get rid of the menace for Lanka. Drive the chariot to Rama", Ravana roared. (*Stop roaring and do something!*)

Ravana's chariot ran towards Rama.

The noise of that chariot spread across all worlds fiercely.

Using the Taamasa arrow, which Brahma had given him (*We cannot believe Brahma. He always gives weapons made of thin sheets.*), he destroyed the Vanaras.

Unable to tolerate the wickedness of Ravana, Sri Rama, the sea of mercy, started at for the battle. (*Oh, so he has started!*)

Rama who was accompanied by Lakshmana is like Indra who was accompanied by Vishnu. (*The poet compared Rama with Indra and Lakshmana with Vishnu! It seems his poetry hesitated out of fear for Ravana.*)

Ravana looked at Rama who had broad eyes, long hands and a great bow. (*Now see the battle between Rama and Ravana!*)

Rama sounded the string of his great bow with his valour. On hearing that frightening sound, the Rakshasas and Vanaras were shocked and fell down.

Lakshmana said that he himself would first fight with Ravana and he showered a rain of arrows. (*Lakshmana's help to Rama! There is no one to help Ravana.*)

While escaping from that rain of arrows and himself raining arrows, Ravana ignored Lakshmana and went towards Rama and showered a rain of arrows on him.

Rama threw a weapon called *Bhalla* and broke Ravana's rain of arrows.

A battle of raining of arrows took place between Rama and Ravana.

None was either victorious nor defeated. Both were fighting with equal vigour.

Rama and Ravana were fighting like gods of death.

The entire world shivered terribly with fear. The entire sky was covered with a rain of arrows. (*We know it!*)

A battle between Rama and Ravana was like a battle between Indra and Vruttasura. (*So, it is also as 'beautiful' as this!*)

Rama shot sharp arrows at Ravana's face and Ravana shot sharp arrows at Rama's face. (*Oh! Will they not prick? Why don't you throw away those arrows aside and call the public and present your arguments?*)

Rama threw a *Roudraasta* (arrow of fury) with *roudra* (fury). (*This is also an old arrow, isn't it? Throw some new arrows! Why furious arrows always? Do you have smiling arrow? Throw it. Let us see if Ravana smiles!*)

The Roudraastra could not pierce Ravana's shield. (*Look! Didn't I ask you to throw a new kind of arrow?*)

All the arrows of Rama were ineffectual and fell like snakes to the ground.

Ravana used an arrow called *Asura*. Along with it he used a lion-faced arrows, tiger faced arrows and arrows with faces of all kinds of animals like crows, vultures, eagles, foxes, hens, wolves, pigs, snakes, donkeys and also arrows that resembled faces of birds. (*So, carpenters in Lanka made arrows in so many designs! Good workmen!*)

Rama threw an arrow called *Aagneeya*. Along with it he threw arrows that resembled faces of the sun, the moon, the half-moon, stars, nine planets, comets and other such powerful arrows. (*Did carpenters in Ayodhya carve moons and suns?*)

Unable to withstand the face of Rama's arrows, all the arrows of Ravana scattered. The Vanaras shouted in joy.

On seeing all his arrows being wasted, Ravana angrily threw Roudrastra, which Maya had made. (*As this does not belong to Brahma, let us see whether this may work.*) As he threw the Roudrastra, swords, spears, clubs, pestles, *Pattasas* and many more arrows came out of Ravana's bow and began to swiftly dart in various directions. (*This arrow seems to work well!*)

Meanwhile Rama threw the *Gandharvastra* and destroyed the Roudraastra.

Unable to control his anger, Ravana threw *Sowraastra*. Immediately, wheel-shaped weapons, that resembled gold plates came out glittering like the sun and the moon from Rama's bow in thousands and swiftly darted across the battle field.

Rama threw another great arrow. (*It has no name. Perhaps it did not strike to the poet as to what name he should give it!*) and it destroyed Sowra astra.

Ravana angrily hit at the vital organs of Rama with ten arrows. (*Nay, how can ten be enough?*)

Rama too hit at Ravana's entire body with arrows.

Meanwhile, Lakshmana shot down Ravana's flag with sharp arrows. (*Lakshmana! Why should you go in the middle while Ravana and Rama are fighting? Did Hanuman not say that while two persons fight, a third person must not interfere?*)

Lakshmana chopped off the head of the charioteer of Ravana with another arrow.

Meanwhile, Vibhishana hit Ravana's horses with a club and killed them.

Jumping from the chariot, Ravana threw 'Shakti' on Vibhishana.

Lakshmana broke it before it fell on Vibhishana. (*See, how many people are there on the side of Rama! There is none for Ravana!*)

Ravana took out another Shakti to throw at Vibhishana.

As Lakshmana was showering rain of arrows on Ravana, Vibhishana could escape and run away.

"You are a great warrior. Because of your grace that base fellow has escaped. All right! I will see who will save you now", saying so Ravana threw the *Maha Shakti* at Lakshmana.

Rama said to Shakti, which was darting swiftly towards Lakshmana, "Shakti! Lakshmana should be safe. Go waste!"

Shakti ignored Rama's words and hit the Lakshmana's chest. (*What does it know the greatness of Rama? On the whole, it defamed Rama!*)

Lakshmana fell down. (*Where did Rama keep his head?*) Unable to control his anger, Rama picked up Shakti from the ground and threw it away. (*What more can he do than this?*)

In the meantime, Ravana hit Rama at his vital organs.

Rama said to Sugriva and Hanuman. "All of you protect Lakhshmana carefully. I will see the end of that wicked fellow. After a long time my long-standing wish is going to be fulfilled. Now either Ravana should die or Rama should die (*araavanamoo, araamamoo*). One of the two must happen.

(*Why any one of the two. It will be nice if the second thing happens.*)

Loss of kingdom, unbearable forest life, roaming in Dandakaranya, another man touching Sita (*Even in the battle field, his thoughts are around other man touching his wife!*) Sita living amidst Rakshasas — All these days, I have faced all these hardships. Now, I will get rid of all these things after killing Ravana. (*You are dumping words, stopping the battle. Why don't you start now?*)

I killed Vali, crowned Sugriva and brought these Vanaras for killing Ravana. (*Oh, I see! You did all this for your own need and not for establishing Dharma! All right! You have uttered the truth at least now.*) I built the bridge only in order to kill this wicked man. (*Everybody knows this. Why unnecessary lecture?*)

This wicked man appeared to me in the battle field. Now he cannot escape from the fury of my arrows. Just as nobody can escape from the threat of a snake whose eyes are full of venom, Ravana cannot escape from me. (*This means, Rama is like a snake whose eyes are filled with venom! The poet is ignorant of the use of similes!*)

Vanaras! All of you happily climb mountains and watch the fierce battle that takes place between Ravana and me. Sages, gods, Gandharvas and every body will (*climb trees and*) see Rama's nature! (*raamatvam*). (*Here we have to understand 'raamatvam' as Rama's valour. Rama himself is saying, "All of you watch Rama's valour!"*)

"Now I will fight in such a way that in this animate and inanimate world, all the living beings will always talk with wonder about my fighting! (*Now, watch! I am starting it!*) Saying so, Rama began to dump arrows on Ravana.

Ravana too began to shower a rain of arrows.

Arrows of Rama and Ravana dashed each other and sounds emanated as if the entire globe was broken. (*How do we hear them? We will believe them only if they are heard!*)

The actions and sounds of bows caused fear and surprise to all the three worlds (*Except us!*)

Unable to withstand Rama's valour, Ravana fled with fear like a cloud chased by the wind.[423]

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423. Yuddha kanda, sarga 110, sloka 63:

"Ravana, who is sad, since Rama — who is very courageous and who possessed a shining bow — showered a rain of arrows, fought with Sri Rama but fled with fear like a cloud chased by the wind."

By the time Rama entered the battle field, except ordinary soldiers, all the big warriors in Ravana's camp had died. Ravana alone was present in the battle. Whereas Rama had many warriors to assist him. This was the situation! As the battle began in this way, Ravana 'fled' from the battle field.

Earlier, once, a battle had taken place between Rama and Ravana. Then Ravana was 'defeated'. Now, he 'fled'! To say that Ravana had fled, means he is a coward, isn't he? Is it a great battle that Rama fought against such a man (coward)? While the battle between Rama and Ravana was going on, why did the poet describe as if Ravana fled without continuing to fight? We will know the reason if we follow the next step in the story. Lakshmana had fainted, hadn't he? Sri Rama had to grieve in various ways as per the tradition expressing his love as a brother. For this purpose the battle had to stop for a while. Aren't there ways to stop the battle? Is it not enough if the poet says, "Now it is night!"

But, it is a scar on the valour of Sri Rama if the battle had continued for two days. He had to kill Ravana in one day. Night should not interrupt the war. Then what is the way to stop the war? Fleeing of Ravana is the only way! After the wave of Rama's love for his brother receded, after Lakshmana regained consciousness and after Rama's camp is comfortably ready to fight again, Ravana — who had fled — must come back.

When the battle came almost to an end, why did the poet make Lakshmana faint? It was to say, "Ravana is a great warrior, you know! Even Rama could not prevent the arrow 'Shakti' that Ravana had thrown at Lakshmana. Rama was fighting with a great warrior!"

Ravana was a great warrior one moment! The next moment he was a coward! Praising him and making him flee in the same moment! ★

(Ravana fled from the battle, didn't he? Now the story goes backwards again and things happen in a different way.)

Rama was talking to Sushena while fighting. "Sushena! The great warrior Lakshmana fell down with the stroke of Ravana's arrow 'Shakti', rolling on the ground like a serpent and causing me agony. While my brother — who is more important than my own life — is suffering like this, how can I fight the battle? Why do I need the kingdom? Why do I need Sita? Why this battle? Why the comforts? My valour feels ashamed. My bow is slipping down. Arrows are missing their target. I am not able to see due to tears. All my limbs are light as if I am walking in a dream. Grief envelopes me. I wish I die. In any country, wives are available, relatives are available but how can we get such a brother?" So saying, Rama fell to the ground and rolled in grief. (*By the time he began to talk with Sushena, Rama was shooting arrows, but by the time he stopped talking he was rolling on the ground.*)

Sushena tried to console Rama. "Rama! Lakshmana is the enhancer of prosperity. His face has not turned black. The gleam is not disturbed. His eyes are peaceful. If he had lost his life, he wouldn't have looked like this. His chest is moving. Don't grieve!"

After consoling Rama, Sushena hurried Hanuman, "Start soon and go to Himavadgiri! Earlier Jambavan had mentioned those medicines hadn't he? Get all of them. You have to return quickly. Otherwise, we cannot save Lakshmana. You have to *come back as soon as if you never left*!"

(Hanuman! Look, without thinking that we need that mountain again, you took it back and put it there. All right! Start quickly!)

Hanuman at once went for the medicinal mountain.

He was not aware of what medicines to bring. "All right! I will carry the entire hill. Every thing will be on it", thinking so, he routed that mountain which is filled with trees, lifted it like a ball and landed on Trikuta mountain as if he were carrying a cloud!

Putting the mountain down, taking a breather for a while (*Why don't you have few drops of buttermilk and satisfy your thirst?*), Hanuman said to Sushena, "I do not know what plants you asked me to bring. So, I have brought the entire hill. See whatever you want." Saying so, he squatted there.

"Well done!" Sushena appreciated, identified the medicinal plants, prepared a powder and put it near Lakshmana's nose for him to smell it. Lakshmana got up as if he had woken up from sleep and sat up comfortably. (*Sushena! Keep the seeds of those plants carefully!*)

Rama embraced Lakshmana (*He gave a gift to Lakshmana for he is alive!*). "Lakshmana! Why should I live if you die? Why the kingdom? Why Sita? Why battle? What is the use even if I conquer Ravana?" He showered love on his brother.

In response to this, Lakshmana showed Rama reverence. "Alas! You are talking like an illiterate! You said you would crown Vibhishana. Good people should keep their promise. It is not proper to abandon every thing for my sake. I pray you to kill Ravana before sunset", Lakshmana prayed. (*Devotees of Rama can enact this scene as a great play. "I will give up every thing for you", says the elder brother. "No, No, do not leave anything for me", says the younger brother!*)

On hearing Lakshmana's words, Rama lifted the bow immediately and shot arrows at Ravana. (*It seems, Ravana was waiting for Rama's arrows!*)

Ravana came in another chariot and attacked fiercely.

"It is not good that Rama does not have a chariot", felt gods.

Indra at once sent his chariot.

Indra's charioteer Matali brought a golden chariot, which was shining like an infant-sun with yellow horses and umbrellas. "Sri Rama! Annihilator of enemies! Indra has sent this chariot, shield, bow and 'Shakti' for you. Stand on the chariot and fight!"

(Hanuman always carries Rama, doesn't he? Has he said he would not carry him this time?)

Rama circumambulated the chariot

reverently and got into it *heroically*.

(*Poor fellow, how many years have passed since he sat in the chariot!*)

Now, you cannot see or tell how the battle between Rama and Ravana took place. It happened so fiercely.

Ravana threw an arrow called *Gaandharvaastra*. Rama also used Gaandharvaastra and felled it down. (*Can one Gaandharvaastra hit another Gaandharvaastra?*)

Ravana used *Daivaastra*. Rama too used a Daivaastra and hit it. (*Is copying Ravana, Rama's fighting?*)

Ravana threw *Pannaga* arrow. Emitting flames and raising their crests, thousands of great serpents pounced on Rama.

Rama threw the *Garuda* arrow. Garuda birds with fierce noses and nails came out of the arrow, pricked the snakes with their beaks and carried away all the serpents with their feet. (*Ravana, why arrows of snakes, throw arrows of ants! We can see what Rama will do!*)

Ravana became furious and hit Rama's horse and the flag on his chariot with sharp arrows. It fell on the chariot and not to the ground. (*Will Rama's flag fall on the ground?*) Rama was unable to defy Ravana as if he had become helpless in the face of Ravana's violent action.

The Vanaras and gods felt extremely sad. The seas felt upset. The horizons trembled.

Rama became furious and looked fiercely at him. Then all the worlds were startled. The earth trembled. (*Does the earth have no other duty except trembling?*)

On seeing Rama's anger, Ravana felt afraid.

All the gods in the sky shouted, "Rama! You only should conquer him!" All the Asuras in the sky said, "Dasagriva! (Ten necked fellow!) You only should conquer him!" (*All these people had died and gone to heaven. We should congratulate these people because, although they had gone to heaven, they did not join hands with gods but remained Asuras! Perhaps, another battle between Devatas and Asuras was going on in the sky — above the heads of those on the ground!*)

Ravana lifted a great spear. It was very fierce. It was so powerful that it could pierce all living beings with thorns that resemble goads and with sharp edges that resemble swords. Ravana lifted such a fierce spear to throw at Rama.

Gods felt afraid. (*Go away! It will fall on you*). Seas.... worlds.... turned upside down.

Ravana threw the spear with all his strength. Ringing the bells, it darted towards Rama like the *staff of Yama*!

Rama too dumped many great arrows but in vain. All were scattered here and there. Emitting fire, the spear moved towards Rama!

Rama became furious and picked up the arrow 'Shakti' that Indra had sent through Matali and threw it.

Owing to the blow of that fierce 'Shakti', that fierce spear broke into pieces. What would have happened if Indra had not sent that Shakti! (*What will happen if Indra does not send, Chandra will send.*)

Later, again, Rama and Ravana showered a rain of arrows on each other. Nobody could see what had happened in that rain. (*What happens? Ravana must have fallen down. Even if we can not see, can't we imagine that much?*)

Rama said sarcastically to Ravana, "Like a coward, you abducted my wife in my absence. (*You should have abducted her in my presence after asking me!*) Are you also a warrior? (*I am a warrior*). When nobody was there to protect her, you harassed and abducted another man's woman. You are arrogantly feeling that you are a great hero. If you had abducted Sita while I was present, you too would have died and reached Khara. (*Rama is charged with emotion, now!*) Accidentally you have appeared before me. I will send you to Yama's world right now. Crows and eagles will sit on your dead body and prick your flesh. They will carry away your intestines." Rama showered a rain of abuses as well as the rain of arrows simultaneously with equal force.

All the arrows came out from Rama's soul. Realising that good omens appeared, Rama increased the rain of arrows with great enthusiasm.

Unable to withstand the rain of stones by the Vanaras and the rain of arrows by Rama, Ravana became helpless with a broken heart.

The charioteer grasped Ravana's condition and drove away the chariot from the battle field.

Ravana felt very angry at the charioteer's act. He felt ashamed. "Charioteer! You have done even in my case as you do in the case of a man who does not have valour and manliness. Why have you diverted me from the battle field without my permission and without knowing my opinion. You have caused tremendous insult to me in front of the enemy. You have ruined all the fame that Ravana does not show his back in the battle. You have wished my enemy's good. Would you have done this, had you wished my good?" He abused him angrily.

The charioteer said with great humility. "I never wish the enemy's good, Your Excellency! It is not my intention to insult you. You are very tired. Your face is withered away with exertion. The horses too are tired and breathing hard. Bad omens are appearing all around. The charioteer must always grasp: What is the condition of the person sitting in the chariot, what is the strength of enemies, whether the battle ground on which the chariot is moving is flat, when we should go directly towards the enemy and when we should go from the sides and so on. I assessed everything and acted like this. We can go back to the battlefield after you relax for a while. Though I have done all this out of love for you and for your good, you misconstrue my motive"[424]

Ravana felt happy. "Yes, you have done a good thing". Saying so, Ravana took out an ornament and gave it to the charioteer as a gift. "Drive the chariot in front of Rama", he said.

Ravana's chariot ran towards Rama.

On seeing Ravana coming again, Rama thought, "How can I kill this man?" Then, Agastya came to Rama along with gods in order to watch the battle. "Rama! I will tell you the secret of defeating the enemy, listen! (*Oh, yes! Tel him! What is happier than that?*) I will tell you a *mantra* (spell) called '*Aditya Hridaya*' which removes all sins, diseases, menace, fears, worries and increases longevity. Chant it and worship the sun, who is almighty!" He narrated that spell and said, "Chant this three times with a resolute mind and go to the battle. You will conquer the enemy." Saying so, he left. (*Without watching the battle! What Mr. poet! Poor fellow, Agastya wanted to watch the battle. But you made him tell the spell and sent him away?*)[425]

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424. Yuddha kanda, entire sarga 106: Ravana is reprimanding the charioteer for taking him away from the battle field. "You have insulted me and acted as you wish. You have destroyed the belief that Ravana does not turn back while fighting."

It is the poet who says that Ravana had fled from the battle field. Also, it is the poet who says that Ravana felt humiliated for the charioteer took him away from the battle field. What is this fleeing away of a person who does not turn back from the battle field? The man who flees — how can he talk with such self-respect? It is the enthusiasm of the poet to talk about the precautions, which a charioteer must take, and how he should drive the chariot in the battle field. Although there is no coherence between what he is saying now and what he has said earlier — that Ravana fled from the battle field!

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425. Yuddha kanda, sarga 107, up to 24 slokas: Sage Agastya — who came along with the gods to watch the battle — approached Rama, who was worried on seeing Ravana, who had come back to fight and said the following."

Ravana has come back again to fight. Rama is upset and is worried. Then Agastya came to Rama and told him the Aditya spell. Well, what will Ravana do until Agastya finished telling Rama that spell? When Ravana's charioteer drove away the chariot, he found time. Then if Agastya comes to Rama, the context will be apt. By the time Ravana returns, Rama too could be ready. But.... Rama worrying after Ravana returned, Agastya's arrival, narrating a twenty-sloka spell, Rama reciting it three times — Should Ravana wait all the while? Okay!

➔

By then Rama's fear had subsided. He stopped wailing. (*nashta sookaha* = one with perished grief; *abhavat* = has become.)

Rama recited that mantra three times, looked at the sun, picked up the bow and was ready for the battle.

The sun felt happy over the meditation of Rama and shouted from amidst gods in the sky (*perhaps he had come to watch the battle*). "Kill Ravana quickly!" (*Sun! While Rama is throwing the burden of killing Ravana onto you, why do you throw it on Rama? Both of you are very funny!*)

Fluttering the flags, filled with weapons, driven by black horses, Ravana's chariot moved in the battle field with a terrific noise.

On seeing Ravana's chariot, Rama (*was shocked and*) said to his charioteer, "Matali! Look at Ravana's chariot! Ravana is going to die. You have to drive the chariot carefully. Now we have to kill Ravana. Be careful! Be bold! Don't lose heart. Don't let your heart get upset. Don't let your vision be disturbed. You should not be careless. Drive the horses without confusion. (*Why don't you drive it yourself instead of pestering him? Matali! Why do you simply listen to him and keep quiet? Why don't you say, 'Hey, sir! I drove the chariot for Indra. What do you think of me? I will drive as much as I can. If you don't want me, tell me clearly. I will take back the chariot.' Matali! It seems you are a stupid fellow!*)

"You are the charioteer of Indra. I know that I need not tell you precautions. But I am reminding you that I concentrate on fighting the battle. (*Rama! You remember for yourself!*) I am not teaching you", said Rama. (*Rama is very cautious while talking. We don't know why?*)

On hearing Rama, Matali felt happy. (*Indra probably harassed him more. The charioteer was happy as he found Rama better!*)

Again a fierce battle! It was Ravana who first rained a shower of arrows. Rama rained them later.

A rain of blood showered on Ravana's chariot. A whirlwind circumambulated it in an inauspicious manner. Wherever Ravana's chariot went by, eagles flew over it in herds. Lightening fell on the Rakshasa army. Comets came darting. The earth trembled only where Ravana was.

While they were fighting with the Vanaras, the hands of Rakshasas stopped functioning as if somebody had held them. (*Who else can hold them? The poet himself held them. Can't he imagine that much?*)

Dust rose up on the battle ground and

➔ 'Aditya Hridaya' is nothing but describing the sun.

"Very bright man. Rises well. Devas, Asuras and every body worship him. He is the lord of earth. He is Brahma, Vishnu, Maheswara and all gods. He is fire. He is wind. He is life. He is the creator. He is sacrifice. He is Vedas. I am praying to such a sun." This is the spell.

The translators gave their own interpretations for every word of the poet. See some examples. *'tapanaha'* means 'one who creates heat'. It is enough if they say, 'the sun creates heat'. But the translators say that the sun creates heat in the enemies of his devotees! This is giving meanings that are not present in the slokas. *'timiroonmadhanaha'* means destroyer of darkness. If they give this meaning and keep quiet, pundits will not have any special credit. They say, 'the sun destroys the darkness of ignorance of foolish people'! (*If this is true, the darkness of ignorance of these stupid pundits.*)

'Tamoobheedi' also means one who destroys darkness. But along this meaning, pundits gave another new meaning. *Rahu* swallows the sun. The sun will come out of Rahu. Hence, *'tamoobheedi'* means 'one who destroys Rahu!' Thus if they drag clearly understandable words also into confusion it is great scholarship! That itself is great knowledge! Otherwise, it is ignorance! These pundits are more horrible than the poet of *Ramayana*! ★

obstructed the sight of Ravana. Quarrelling among themselves, the cruel birds came and fell on Ravana's chariot.

Tears from the eyes and the sparks of fire from the waist of Ravana's horses suddenly fell down.— Thus, bad omens for Ravana and good omens for Sri Rama appeared.

Rama felt happy (*owing to the courage that bad omens gave him*) that Ravana's death was inevitable.

The battle of Rama and Ravana was going on fiercely, terribly and surprisingly! (*We don't believe your descriptions. We will decide ourselves how the battle takes place!*)

The Rakshasa troops and Vanara troops stopped fighting, stood side by side and watched the battle between Rama and Ravana. (*How nice it would have been if you had this sense and unity right from the beginning? How nice it would have been, had you told your kings, "Why should we fight among ourselves for your sake? You fight among yourselves and die!"*)

Rama and Ravana fought out of a longstanding hatred for each other!

Rama was sure of his victory. Ravana was also sure of his defeat.[426]

In order to fell down the flag on Rama's chariot, Ravana angrily shot an arrow. But it fell down without hitting the flag.

But Rama's arrow dislodged Ravana's flag, which fell to the ground.

Unable to control the anger, Ravana hit Rama's horses. The horses were unperturbed. They were not afraid. Ignoring the shower of the arrows as if they had been hit with lotus twigs, they stood happily. (*Are they horses or male buffaloes!*)

Ravana realised that Rama's horses were unperturbed and thought it was no use to rely on horses. So, he turned towards Rama. He threw all kinds of weapons: clubs, *parighas*, wheels, spears and arrows on to Rama. The funny thing was that none of them fell on Rama's chariot. They fell on the Vanaras who were around. (*The poet ridicules Vanaras so much! He simply uses them but nowhere does he show love or affection for them!*)

Ravana continued showering arrows on Rama.

Rama laughed carelessly. (*Laugh for Rama?*)

Owing to the rain of arrows of Rama and Ravana, the second sky under the sky became so dense that even air could not enter. Their arrows hit each other without missing their targets. They did not go waste.

The two chariots were touching each other and darting side by side. They came closer one moment and went far the next moment. They were galloping side by side. One went round the other. Each one overtook the other. They floated like clouds. They hit each other. Their yokes touched each other. The horses of the chariots were looking at each other's faces. (*What do they say to each other? Perhaps they might be thinking, "When will this menace end? The wicked people have dragged us also into the battle? If they want why don't they kill each other?"*)

Ravana's arrows hit Rama but they did not cause pain. (*No pain to the horses! No pain to Rama! May be Rama's skin is also like that of horses!*)

Rama, the hero, has been shooting "twenty, thirty, sixty, hundred and thousand arrows".

Ravana too threw all kinds of weapons and drowned Rama with them.

On seeing a dangerous situation for Rama, the seven seas felt depressed. The entire earth trembled. The sun's light diminished. The wind stood still. Gods in the sky shouted. "May all be well with the cows and Brahmins. (*Are Brahmins equal to cattle?*) May all the worlds attain peace! May Sri Rama conquer Ravana!" They were

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426. Yuddha kanda, sarga 109, sloka 7: kaakutsthaha = Rama; jeetasyamiti = that victory is sure; Ravanah = Ravana; martavyamiti = that death is sure; dhrutau = determine. They demonstrated their valour in the battle. This means, Rama had strong confidence that he would win the battle. Ravana too realized very clearly that he would face the defeat.

Right from the beginning, Ravana has been thinking, that he would surely lose the battle.★

saying, "Ah! How wonderful the battle between Rama and Ravana is! The sky is equal to the sky! The sea is equal to the sea! The battle between Rama and Ravana is equal to itself."

Then the great shouldered Rama aimed the sword in the bow and slayed Ravana! His head fell off.

Immediately another head cropped up on Ravana's neck.

Rama was surprised and he cut it off again.

Another head cropped up.

Again, he chopped it off.

Again, another one cropped up. (*How shrewd that head is!*)

Thus, Rama chopped off Ravana's heads 101 times. Yet it was in vain. (*In which Ganga* that Aditya Hridaya mantra *fell*?)

Rama felt worried, "All my arrows are going waste!"

Ravana was still showering a rain of weapons on Rama.

The battle went on day and night without any interruption of even one moment. But Rama was not victorious.

Matali found no signs of Rama's victory. (*His body was burning with anger, on seeing the way Rama fought!*)

See what Matali says to Rama. "Rama! Twam =you, ajaananniva = like an ignorant man; eenam = This Ravana; anuvartaseekim = why are you following? (*This means, you are fighting merely by imitating Ravaṅa. When he throws an arrow, you throw another arrow only to oppose it. You are trying to defend not taking an offensive stand independently to strike the enemy. You are following Ravana's actions." After all, this is the beauty of Ravana's fighting! Matali had to tell this great hero how to fight!*)

Matali reminded Rama, "Rama! Use Brahma's arrow to kill Ravana!"

"When Matali reminded him Rama picked up a flaming arrow which was hissing like a serpent" (*Rama realised that he had to use Brahma's arrow only after Matali told him. This sort of Rama preaches great sermons to all people. Had Rama driven the chariot and Matali fought, Matali would have used Brahma's arrow a long while ago! Ravana would have been killed a long time back, wouldn't he? Poor fellows, where will devotees of Rama hide their heads (in shame)? It is the poet's obsession to tell us how one should fight a battle. It would have been a different matter, if some Mahendra had come and said these words to Rama. If the charioteer tells Rama how to fight a battle, will it not mean that Rama does not know what a charioteer knew?*)

Agastya had given that Brahma's arrow to Rama. In fact Brahma had originally made it for Indra in the past. (*So old! The poet did not say how it came from Indra to Agastya.*)

That Brahma's arrow has the god of wind at its sides. (*Perhaps, it looks like a bird!*)

Its entire body is like the sky. (*All right, let it be in any form! Will it work or not?*)

Rama aimed such a great arrow which had never failed and which drowned and floated in the blood of enemies. (*My god! The job of the weapon is to drown and float in blood!*)

The seas got confused. The earth shivered. (*Yeah, it is what the earth does!*)

Rama furiously threw Brahma's arrow at Ravana.

It landed upon Ravana and broke his chest. Ravana fell to the ground from the chariot.

The Brahma's arrow returned into Rama's quiver obediently.

As soon as Ravana lost his life, all the Rakshasas fled away. Not sparing those fleeing Rakshasas, the Vanaras chased them shooting at them.

Gods played drums. They danced. They showered a rain of flowers on Rama's chariot. A soft breeze blew with a fragrance. The sky became clear.

Sages shouted, "Amen! Amen!"

Sugriva, Lakshmana, Vibhishana and everybody came to Rama's chariot and eulogized him. (In fact, they should worship Matali. Had he not told Rama, he would never conquered Ravana.)

★ ★

Vibhishana wailed for his brother out of extreme love. "O great hero! World famous man! Pundit of moral sciences! A man who lie on the est beds! Have you died and lie on the ground ow? Alas! I had told you at the beginning itself. ou did not relish my words. You are facing the onsequence now.... A man who knew all norals has passed away. The real form of oddess of Dharma has vanished. A great evered man has perished. The falling of a great ero Ravana means the falling of the sun to the round! It is like the moon drowning in darkness. he god of fire has become cool along with avana. Enthusiasm has become shelter less.

If the Rakshasa king has left his body, what emains in these worlds? (*You have remained, aven't you?*) A great wind called Rama routed great tree called Ravana. A lion called Rama illed a fat elephant called Ravana. A great cloud alled Rama watered down a great fire called avana.” — Thus Vibhishana wailed according the scriptures and poetry.

Rama tried to console Vibhishana, Vibhishana! Why do you wail? Ravana did not ie like a coward without valour. He died ighting with great valour. Those who wish the elfare of the other world die in the battle field. t is not necessary to wail for them. This man as an intelligent (*dhiimata*) man who had onquered the three worlds. (*Surprising! What this — the qualities, which were bad when he as alive, have now become good?*) Once we egin the battle, we do not know who will win nd who lose! One can win or lose. Therefore, ive up wailing. Think about what to do next. *Come on, let us occupy Lanka!*)

Vibhishana looked reverently at Rama and aid, “Rama! Ravana had given many charities. e worshipped teachers. He rescued those who ought refuge in him. He enjoyed many leasures. He had the great power of penance. e knew the nature of Brahma. I would like to erform all his funeral rites with your mercy”

On hearing the “merciful words” of ibhishana, Rama agreed with him. “Hostility hould be as long as one is alive. After one asses away, why should we have hatred for the eceased? Our task is fulfilled. (*Now, Lanka is urs!*) Perform all the rites and seek Ravana's ood in the other world.”

★ ★

On hearing that Ravana had passed away, all the women in the harem rushed to the battle field — wailing, with dishevelled hair and rolling on the ground.

Amidst several thousands of lakhs of dead bodies and butchered limbs, all of them saw Ravana's body, fell on it and wailed . Some embraced his feet, some his hands, some fainted, some raised their hands towards the sky and wailed. “O my lord! Indra among kings!”, they shed tears profusely. (*See how all the wives of Ravana abuse their own husband and praise Sri Rama and Vibhishana!*) “Alas! You — a hero who scared even gods – have fallen to the ground. You did not heed any of the good things which many people told you. You yourself invited your death. We are also dead along with you. Vibhishana gave you good advice in many ways. Had you heeded his advice, this battle would not have taken place. We would not have become widows. All of us are totally destroyed since you cruelly and forcibly confined Sita. You abused a very noble man like Vibhishana out of ignorance. O Rakshasa king! Of course you did not do any thing independently in this aspect. Every thing is decided by god. It is god who makes us do every thing. Whomever god decides death, they meet this kind of death. We cannot alter the decisions of god by our wealth and valour.”

Ravana's first wife Mandodari said wailing, “How strange it is that an ordinary man who is in exile killed a great valorous man like you? How shameful it is for you! Rama killed fourteen thousand people in Janasthana. He is not an ordinary man. We were afraid when Hanuman came to Lanka. When Rama built a bridge over the sea, we thought he was not a human being. Indra or Yama had come in the form of Rama since they could not fight with you as themselves.

Sri Rama is a great man. A supreme soul. An eternal spirit. Invincible. Creator of this world. Ruler of the world. Sri Maha Vishnu became a human being for the sake of the welfare of the world. All the gods became Vanaras. They destroyed the Rakshasas who commit wicked acts.

In the past you conducted penance and conquered your senses. All those senses conquered you with vengeance. (*Sages! Have all of you realised that if you do penance, your senses will have grudge against you?*)

You did not listen though I told you many a time not to have animosity with Sri Rama. You desired Sita for your ruin. You wicked man! (*The poet is making Mandodari abuse her husband as 'durmati'*!)

You brought a woman who is a great devoted wife who has reverence for her husband. (*Then why don't you have respect for your husband? You ought to show respect whatever be the nature of your husband, oughtn't you? — But, it seems Mandodari is always used to burn with anger because Ravana always used to bring other women. Now, she has got an opportunity to abuse him.*)

You would have been destroyed when you brought Sita. But, your lustre saved you. You are now facing the fruits of that sin. A person who does good deeds will get good fruit, one who does bad deeds will get bad fruit.

Vibhishana will be happy since he has done a good thing. You are ruined since you were wicked. You could not realise that you had wives who are more beautiful than Sita. Sita is not superior to me either in her ancestry, beauty or knack. She is not even equal to me. You did not realise it. Along with Sita you brought death.

Now, Sita will join her husband and be happy. I will grieve for a long time without sexual pleasures. I used to saunter along with you on the peak of Kailasa, in Kubera vana and on Meru mountain. Now, I have lost all my pleasures and wealth and became an ordinary woman. Riches and wealth are unstable, aren't they?

My husband! How lacklustre is your face which was decorated in many ways! All these days, I used to feel proud that my father was the king of Danavas, my husband the king of Rakshasas and my son the warrior who conquered Indra. I used to think none could conquer my people.

I cannot believe that Rama has killed you. Is this a dream? I was immersed in grief when my Indrajit passed away. Now, I am also a dead person. I do not grieve even if I lose my relatives. I am grieving now because of your absence. Leaving me behind, have you left for heaven? Why didn't you take me along with you? Why do I need this life without you?

Why don't you feel annoyed for we — your wives — have come without veils?[427]

You have turned many devoted wives into widows. Those pious women cursed you. Now, it is proved that calamity is inevitable if the tears of devoted wives trickle down and fall on the earth.

You abducted Sita like a coward when Rama was not present.

Your brother Vibhishana told you in many ways. His words were very reasonable and just. My husband! Look! Owing to your absence, the sun rays have entered Lanka without fear. Alas! You are no longer alive for us." Mandodari fell on her husband and wailed.

All the rival wives consoled Mandodari, "Don't grieve! Don't grieve. Life and wealth are perishable, aren't they? Don't you know this?"

Mandodari wailed so much that her breasts were wet with tears. (*See where the looks of the poet are?*)

Rama said to Vibhishana, "Send away all the women. Make arrangements for the funeral rites of Ravana."

Vibhishana said, "This Ravana was an utterly vile fellow. A unjust man. A cruel person. A liar. I will not perform funeral rites for such a man. Though he is my brother, he was an enemy. He tortured every body. If I perform rites for such a man, all people will blame me. They will appreciate me if I do not perform the rites. Therefore, I will not perform rites for him."

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427. Yuddha kanda, sarga 114, slokas 63 & 64: Mandodari's words: "My husband! Why are you not angry with us — your wives — who came here walking without veils?" The restriction that women should stay in harems with veils and behind curtains was also there in Ravana's kingdom just as we have in Rama's kingdom!

★

On hearing Vibhishana's words, Rama felt delighted. (*parama priitaha*). "Yes, as you said, Ravana is a wicked fellow. An unjust man. A liar. He harassed all the worlds. But now he is dead. We showed our hatred for him until he died. You will get fame that the younger brother performed rites even though the elder brother was a wicked man. You must perform the rites", said Rama.

Vibhishana agreed. All arrangements were made for the funeral rites.[428]

The pyre with good sandal wood was arranged. Fragrant roots and skin of an antelope were spread on the pyre. Ravana was placed there. A cart (*sakata*) was placed on his feet and a grinding stone (*uluukhilam*) on his thighs. A holy cattle (*The translators used the word, 'kapila goovu'*) was killed, its skin was dipped in ghee and placed it on Ravana. Sandal paste and flowers were sprinkled. Wailing, Vibhishana lit the pyre.

All the funeral rites ended as per Vedic rules. (*Veda vihitam* = As imposed by Vedas, *Brahmya* = As per Vedas.)

After the cremation, Vibhishana took a bath, sent the women to the harems and stood humbly near Rama.

All the gods in the sky left the place, narrating Rama's story.

By the order of Rama, Matali too went back to heaven along with the chariot.

Rama said to Lakshmana, "Lakshmana! I want to see Vibhishana's coronation in Lanka. Get his coronation done." (*This means Rama will not enter Lanka from that wall! Because he is a sage! He can't enter cities but can he fight battles?*)

Saying 'yes', Lakshmana gave a *Binde* (golden metal pot) to those Vanaras — who moved as swiftly as the mind and who were very strong — and asked them to get sea water. (*The poet is in an imagination that one has to go very far to reach the sea. That is why, he is sending very strong and swiftly moving people. He forgot that the sea was right there!*)

Vibhishana's coronation was celebrated as per the Vedas. His ministers and his followers felt happy.[429]

All the people gave various kinds of flowers and eatables ('*moodakaan*' in Sanskrit = '*kuDumulu*' in Telugu; '*laajaan*' in Sanskrit = '*peelaalu*' in Telugu) as gifts.

After the coronation was over, Vibhishana carried gifts for Rama and went to the place where Rama stayed.

For the sake of pleasing Vibhishana, Rama accepted those gifts (*poor fellow! He might have eaten 'kudumuus' long ago!*)

Then, looking at Hanuman, Rama said, "Hanuman! Take Vibhishana's permission (*This was to respect the kingly honour of Vibhishana!*) and enter Lanka. Go to Sita, inform her about my well being, tell her about Ravana's death and bring her message to me!"[430] ★

[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

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[428] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 101, slokas up to 24:** In these slokas, Vibhishana wailed for his brother, praised him a lot and sought Rama's permission to perform rites. Rama agreed. In **sarga 114, slokas 95 to 97:** Vibhishana abused his brother and refused to perform rites. ★

[429] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 115, slokas 17 & 18:** "On seeing Vibhishana, the Rakshasa king, whose coronation was celebrated, his ministers and Rakshasas who had reverence for him felt happy." When Vibhishana came to power, people of his group alone felt happy. ★

[430] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 115, sloka 25:**

While sending Hanuman to Sita, Rama said, "You are fit to go to tell this happy news to Sita and to get her message". This means, 'bring her reply to me'. ★

Story-14

The Public Trial

Sita is happy!

She has been hearing the news of the battle continuously.

Ravana's death.

End of the battle with Sri Rama's victory.

Recollecting the entire past, Sita is wondering. Attempts to coronate her husband, the scheming of that wicked woman, unbearable forest life, sexual desire of another man toward her beauty, her rejection, her husband's enthusiasm for the battle, annihilation of the enemy — every thing is past. The entire period of hardship has passed away like a dream... vaguely.

Now, reunion with her husband... Happy life!

Sita is sighing with extreme joy.

Recollecting the past repeatedly, she is wondering.

My husband has killed the enemy for my sake.

He waged a deadly battle only out of love for me.

I too have waited with restraint for my husband.

Which woman — except me — can live without yielding to pleasures, without distraction and concentrate her entire life on her husband for a long time? Except great devoted wives?

Had I agreed, I would have become the empress of Ravana's empire. All the wives of Ravana would have surrendered at my feet! Except devoted wives, can ordinary women reject such a high position and wealth? For great-devoted wives like me, desire for pleasures and desire for other men are condemnable.

Only due to my rejection, Ravana has now hugged the goddess of death *to his utmost satisfaction*.

Will my good character and devotion to my husband be not known to my husband, relatives and the public.....?

Sita's heart is turning into a sea of joy.

Only in the stories of antiquity, I have heard about the sacrifice of devoted wives and their character!

How much admiration they have in the world!

Now, for me too.... in the entire world....

"*Mother* Sita! Are you well?"

Sita looked at Hanuman with wonder.

"It is me, mother! Have you recognised me?... Your husband is safe and well!"

At once tears welled up in her eyes.

"Every thing has gone off smoothly. You too might have heard. That wicked man has been ruined. Your husband is victorious. Finally, all your hardships are over. You have borne it all for such a long time. *A patient cow will get clean water*. Your husband is overwhelmed with joy because you are alive unharmed by that wicked fellow. He asked me to tell you the same. — 'Fortunately you are alive. *It is like ten thousands for me*. I fought this battle with great effort and valour only to rescue you from the enemy. Now, think that Lanka is under my possession. Now, be happy and without fear that you are in Ravana's kingdom'. — This is how he has asked me to tell you. This is true. Now, don't worry. You should not shed tears any more." Hanuman reprimanded Sita with affection.[431]

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[431] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 116, slokas 9 to 14:** When Rama asked Hanuman to go to Sita, he simply said, "Inform Sita about my victory and that I am safe. Bring Sita's message." But Hanuman said to Sita even those words which Rama had not said. We will find a lot of difference between what Hanuman said and what Rama will subsequently say. Therefore, we have to carefully ➔

Wiping her tears with joy, Sita smiled and sighed. "No, *my child*! I am not grieving. My heart is surging like a high tidal wave with uncontrollable joy. I am not able think how I will be able to clear your debt. Even if I got all the kingdoms and wealth of the three worlds, they are not equal to the happy news that you have brought. I cannot give you a suitable present!"

"Why such words mother! It is enough that you say that! That itself is a present for me! What present do I need more than seeing Sri Rama conquer the enemies and being happy?" Hanuman felt shy.

"Hanuman! You always talk so softly and pleasantly. You are as soft as much as heroic. In your words.... deeds.... there is wealth of humility that is proportionate to your strength and valour!"

Feeling shy, turning his head from side to side, Hanuman saw the Rakshasa maid servants, who stood here and there with fear. As soon as he saw them, Hanuman lost his patience and overpowered by anger. "Oh, I see! You are still here? Death has approached all of you! Let me catch each one of you... hold your locks of hair.... Wait and see what I will do.... Do you think that I did not witness how you harassed Mother Sita? I will see how you will escape now. I will give big blows to each one of you

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➔ notice the words of Hanuman. Hanuman is telling her the following as Rama's words: "O lady of godliness! I am telling you happy news. O virtuous woman! (*The poet used the word 'dharmagyne!': one who knows what is right or virtuous. What does this mean? This means one who is like a devoted wife. Hence, the translators translated it as 'O lady who knows the duty of a devoted wife'! When Rama addressed so, it means that Rama is conceding that Sita remained a devoted wife.*) Luckily you are alive I have attained victory due to my valour.... Now, this Lanka has come under my control. (*Vasee = under the control; sthitaa =is. Whose control? The poet did not say whether it was under the control of Rama or Vibhishana. As it is Rama who is saying this, and as he is claiming that his own valour gave him victory, we can interpret that Rama is saying that Lanka is under his control. The translators too gave the same interpretation.*)

"In order to get you from the clutches of the enemy, I gave up sleep with strong determination and fulfilled the vow of killing the enemy. (*Hanuman is telling Sita as if Rama has said, "I killed the enemy only for your sake... to rescue you."*)

"This entire Lanka is kept under the control of Vibhishana." (*This means, first Lanka is mine. I have kept it under Vibhishana's control!*)

You are at your own house. Do not worry. (*swagruhe* = at the own house; *parivartasee* = is present. Lanka itself is Sita's own house! According to Rama's Dharma, the house of the husband is a woman's home. Even a parental home is not her own, is it? For Sita, Rama's house is her own house and Vibhishana's house is also her own house.

If Rama wanted to give courage to Sita, he ought to have said: "Vibhishana is our friend. There is no harm from a friend. As you are in the house of a friend, don't worry." Is it not wrong to say, "Think of Vibhishana's house as your house." Hanuman said all these words to Sita as if they were Rama's words. Did Rama really ask Hanuman say those words?

Moreover, all these words will become totally opposite to what Rama himself said to Sita later.

If Hanuman wanted to say words that would give happiness to Sita, he could have said, "*Mother*! Your husband fought and killed the enemy for your sake. Now, you need not worry." But, it was wrong to say, "Rama said so". Because, the words which Rama says later will be different.

★

and thrash you… Mother Sita! You say, 'yes'! I will see who will come and rescue these bitches. I will thrash all of them together, make them vomit blood and make them *bite the dust*…. Oh! If I see any one of them, I feel as if I have *smeared ground chillies on my body* and ablaze with fury…. Hey, woman of rough hair! What did you do to Sitamma? I will remove your hair and… Hey, woman of sharp teeth! I will give a kick on your lips and break all your teeth. Don't hurry!.... See that woman with those big protruding eyes! How she had hid behind the tree!.... I will see how long you will hide! If Lakshmana sees you, he will brandish his sword swiftly and chop off your noses and ears. How big is that job? I will myself do that job. First let me catch this short woman and….." Hanuman jumped with enthusiasm on these Rakshasa maids who were nearby.

Yelling with fear, all the maid servants gathered behind Sita and stood shivering.

Sita prevented Hanuman with a *serene* smile. "Be calm my child! What is their fault in troubling me? Slaves and maid servants always act as per the command of their masters, don't they? How is it fair to punish these innocent people? Noble persons ought to forgive even great sinners. Who is there who does not do mistakes in the world? Every body does. I do not know what sin I had committed in some previous birth! I have faced the consequence of that sin. What is the use of punishing others for my sin?" Sita sighed.

Hanuman's enthusiasm is watered down. But he could not become calm quickly as he was feeling happy by imagining how to kick each one of the maid servants and how to trouble and harass each of them.

"You always do this, mother! You did the same thing earlier also. You did not allow me to kick even one bitch." Hanuman said irritably and threatened them with sidelong look, "I will not spare you. See if I do not kick you when Sita Devi does not notice. Meanwhile he remembered Rama and said obediently, "Mother! Your husband must be waiting for you…. Now, I will leave….. What do you want me to tell him?"

Sita felt a bit shy. "Now, what can I say, my child! All my eagerness is to see my husband. I will be very happy if I can see my lord as soon as possible." She lowered her head.

"All right, mother! You will see your husband, brother-in-law and everybody. I will go now and tell your husband. Don't worry", saying so Hanuman left in strides.

A while after Hanuman left, Vibhishana came to Asoka vana with some women.

Sarama came near Sita along with all the women. "Mother! Your husband wants to see you. Every thing is ready for your service. Have a nice *head bath*….adorn yourself and ….."

"No. I do not want any adornment. I will come like this. Take me quickly", Sita rose unwillingly.

"Mother! Your husband has ordered us to bring you with ornaments. As soon as Hanuman told him, Sri Rama ordered my husband. Don't you know that it is the duty of a woman to follow the instructions of her husband?"

Sita felt disappointed and bowed her head. It was Sita's wish to show to her husband and the people how averse she was toward comforts, how ornament-less she was, how dejected she had been, how untidy she was, how pious she was and how much she had grieved while she lived in the house of another man! If I adorn myself well in silk garments and all ornaments and stand before my husband, how can he grasp the grief and plight that I have experienced all these days? Can he imagine my pathetic situation on mere hearsay through Hanuman? I must go in this appearance to my husband… But…..

Sarama consoled Sita and tried to convince her. "I know your agony? You are eager to see how soon you will see your husband. All the maid servants will adorn you without any delay. There are many Vanaras and people of Lanka in the presence of your husband. If you stand like this before all of them will it not be insulting to your husband? If you adorn yourself in addition to your beauty, it will be *like adding fragrance to gold*!"

Sita agreed unwillingly. All the maid servants, with great enthusiasm, massaged Sita's body with fragrant substances and gave her *head bath* with scented water. They smeared sandal paste on her body . They dropped her in a silk sari and adorned her with ornaments all over her body.

They brought and kept a palanquin in front of the door. They put a soft mattress and a blanket in it.

Feeling shy and bowing her head, Sita sat in the palanquin. The bearers lifted the palanquin.

★ ★

Whenever Rama thought of Sita, all his thoughts were about her conjugal fidelity.

After Ravana died and Lanka came under his control, it became imperative for Rama to clarify about Sita. Should I accept Sita? Or…. Is Sita in fact chaste? That wicked man… Such a lustful men…. without molesting…. another man's wife…. Nay….. can't believe.

A woman without character…. A man like me from a noble family…

Sugriva accepted without any objection his wife who had spent time with another man. Since he is an uncivilised man, he did a base and unmanly thing.

But…. Gautama accepted Ahalya!.... It is surprising!.... It is some thing that I heard when I was very young…. Yet so fresh is it in my memory as if I had heard it yesterday or the day before!.... The values of sages…. could be different?..... A anyway, a noble man like me who was born in the Raghu dynasty….. a wife who has no character…..

"Alas! Why do you say, 'She is not chaste! She is not chaste'?.... Are you again suspecting Sita?" The inner voice got annoyed silently.

Rama frowned and looked down. "Am I unjustly suspecting her?.... A lustful man like Ravana…. would he leave another man's wife?" He became furious within himself.

"If it were you, would you not do any thing to her?"

"I won't", said he and at once corrected himself and furiously rained a series of questions. "If it were me, why would I abduct another man's wife? Have you forgotten, that I have a commitment to one wife, and talking like this? Does Ravana behave as I behave towards other women?....Was Ravana like me?"

"Ravana was not like you. True. But Sita is like you. Just as you believe that it is a matter of reputation to have commitment to one wife, Sita too believes that it is a matter of reputation to be a devoted wife without yielding to another man."

"It is not my view that Sita would yield willingly. That wicked man…. who is in fact a lustful fellow…. would he have kept quiet without forcing her to yield to him?"

"All your loyal men are telling that he kept quiet, don't they? Hanuman, Vibhishana…."

"How do they know the actual truth?"

"Vibhishana's wife was present there, wasn't she? Day and night maidservants were watching. Don't they know what had happened?"

"………………."

"Sita herself said that Ravana did not touch her, didn't she? Do you think that she is lying? If anything had happened, Sita herself would have admitted that she had lost her chastity."

"…………………."

"What? Why don't you talk? Still, do you have any doubt?"

"What will the world say if I do such an unmanly thing? Will the world believe if I say, 'My wife is innocent. He had simply taken her but did not touch her'? The world will laugh at it…. Having stayed so long a time in the house of another man…… having lost chastity….."

"Oh!.... Again….. the same word? It is unfair, you see!"

"No. Not unfair. I will say it again and again. Is Sita chaste?..... Do not discuss unnecessarily with me. I have read all the scriptures! I know how to behave in a give situation! Did Sita, in fact, listen to me when I asked her not to come to the forest? Did she follow her husband's words?"

"Alas! Unable to withstand separation, she too came here, didn't she? She had come here with an intention to serve your feet, hadn't she? Can't you understand this much? You may get angry if I ask you the question, 'under what pretext would you have attacked Ravana had Sita not been abducted?"

"What? Did I attack under the pretext of Sita?....If not for Sita, what was the need for me to attack Ravana?"

"Don't you have the need? Killing Ravana? Protecting sages? Annihilation of the enemy? Establishing Dharma? Imperial supremacy?..... How do all these things happen? As if you had attacked for the sake of Sita….. How long will you conceal it from me. Who am I? I am your soul. Don't I know the truth or untruth about you? You may handle your affairs as you like but I cannot tolerate it if you think so harshly in the case of Sita. Without having the sense that I am your soul, without listening to the sermons of the soul, however much the soul is suffering, why do you follow that slavery to practise those morals and values?"

"Are you my soul! Then why do you differ with my thoughts? Why do you ridicule the knowledge, which I have learnt from my young age? Why this opposition between me and my soul?"

"Do I always oppose you? I come into conflict with you only when I cannot tolerate the baseness of your actions. It is a matter of joy if you follow me. You are able to understand this."

"No. It is a matter of insult to follow you and not a matter of joy. If I follow you, you will make me a laughing stock. Souls always drag one towards defying the world and Dharma. You dislike political ethics, social ethics, shrewdness, humility and everything. You say you do not yield to any thing. You do not allow me to yield. You taught me not to show reverence to the father. Do you remember? You taught me not to kill Vali, have you forgotten? Now, you are preaching me not to reject Sita. I do not have confidence in your sermons. How have I become so noble a person today? It is because I suppressed my grief and declared reverence to my father.

How could I become such a great king with so many friends and subsidiary kings? It was because I killed Vali by pushing fear for sin behind!

What would happen to me had I followed your words right from the beginning? How would your sermons help me? My fame is my Dharma. Dharma sastras are my means! Show me which Dharma sastra ordains to accept the wife whom another man has touched? I do not care for your sermons. Why should I accept an unchaste woman?"

"I will not say any more. You have become harsher than before. Not allowing me to raise my head, you have become a base man who kills your own soul…. I will not be afraid however angry you are…. Look around! How all the people are watching your harshness so strangely! Having passed through a big danger, Sita is coming after a long time to see you. Will you also behave so harshly to her?"

"Yes. I will behave harshly. Do you want me to shower mercy instead of harshness on this unchaste base woman?"

"I am saying the final word. Sita has very good character!"

"If she is a woman of such a good character, will she prove that she is not guilty?"

"Prove? How can she prove it?"

"Well, I don't know! Without having any proof….. do I lack self-respect so that I get my wife back home in a doubtful condition? Such a shameful thing has never happened in our family sine the days of my grand father and great grand fathers. I will not show mercy on Sita"

"All right! I am going. You have reached a stage where you can totally destroy your soul. You have become such a base man that you cannot tolerate *even a movement in your soul.* Still sticking to you, trying to reform you, coming into conflict with you.... why this futile effort?"

Voices of the bearers of the palanquin at a distance.

Rama stood angrily and fiercely.

"Sita is coming! Sita is coming!", the wind informed everybody.

People are excited.

Curiosity to see Sita.

"We fought risking our lives — only for the sake of this Sita. Let us see how she looks like?"

"She looks very beautiful, they say. That's why Ravana invited death!"

"Unless he is a fool.... however beautiful she might be.... should he be so adamant that he invited death?"

"You will not be adamant. If you find a way to live a few days more, you will lead a family life even with a monkey."

The Rakshasa corps were *swinging canes* and chasing away Vanara soldiers and the people of Lanka. "Get away.... Get away.... Sita Devi is coming.... You should not stay here. Go away", they shouted. [432]

People move away and again gather at the same place.

The corps is warning the people and making way for the palanquin to come.

As Rama's thoughts are disturbed, he observed the situation and said angrily to Vibhishana, "Why are you chasing them away?"

"Lord! Sita Devi is coming to *your presence*.... All these people......"

"Nothing wrong in it. Let them stay. Everybody can see women in danger, battle field, marriage ceremonies and sacrifices. It is not wrong. Character protects woman not veils and harems." [433]

To all those who were observing Rama's facial expressions, Rama's attitude was surprising.

All people felt very strange for Rama is immersed in deep thought..... inattentiveness ..... anger instead of smiles.... and silence even in the happy moments of Sita's arrival.

Afraid of impending danger, Lakshmana stood in a sorrowful mood.

Sugriva expressed his surprise in the ears of Nila. "Why is Rama looking so irritable? What is the matter?"

"That is what I was looking at. Perhaps he is angry with his wife. I don't know what he will do!"

The palanquin stopped at a distance.

Sita got down with shyness. She walked behind Vibhishana, bowing her head.

People on both the sides pushed each other and looked at Sita with curiosity.

"She is beautiful!"

"Not so much!"

"They said, she looks like Rambha?"

"May be she is like Rambha. Have you seen Rambha?"

"Not that great, you see. If we put all those jewels, my wife will look more beautiful"

"Had Ravana known, he would have abducted your wife."

Rama looked at Sita who was coming behind Vibhishana.

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432. Yuddha kanda, sarga 117, sloka 20: See how the corps were dispersing the people. *Veetra jarghara paanaa yaha* = those who have harsh hands holding canes. (*Those who were beating angrily with canes*); *tatra* = there; *samantaat* = then; *parichakrayaha* = Roamed. Is there any difference between this corps in Lanka and the present day police who hold canes in their hands? Beating people with canes and controlling them with threats of thrashing — is the duty of the 'protection' force — then and now as well. ★

433. Yuddha kanda, sarga 117, sloka 26: Rama's words about women: "Veils, curtains, houses, compound walls and clothes are not their protection. Their character is their protection."

What did Rama say with regard to women in his sermons when Bharata came to Chitrakuta? What did he say about harems? He said all those things must be tight and they protect women! ★

He is thinking. He looked annoyed. What should I do? She will salute my feet as soon as she comes. Will she salute? Does she still have so much reverence?.... Raise her….. to the bosom…. Nay!.... Having born in Ikshvaku dynasty…. Then….. what should I do?"

"Lord Sri Rama!! Your lawful wife has come to see you!"

With a harsh face, sharp looks, immobility, serenity and silence, Rama was like a carved statue.

Silence!.... Surprise!... Doubts among the people. What is this? Having grieved and anxious for his wife… now… so indifferent….. so dispassionate…..

Taking steps towards Rama, seeing her husband with the burden of long separation, with shyness, with the joy that she has crossed a great danger and unable to see the facial expressions of her husband in her anxiety, Sita said, "My Lord!" She stood at a distance, bowed her head and shed tears profusely"

As Sita appeared with so much adornment and beauty and as he heard her voice, Rama's annoyance doubled.

He frowned and looked harshly.

"Sita! Listen to my words carefully. Now, I will not accept you since you were in the house of another man. I fought the battle against Ravana not for your sake. Not with an intention to get you back. I fought the battle only in order to satisfy my grudge against the enemy who had abducted my wife. I took revenge by killing the enemy who had insulted me. The efforts of my friends and mine have become fruitful. I have no desire to accept you again."

Unable to understand anything, Sita looked in surprise.

Tumult began among the people.

"Sita! I am not an incapable man who tolerates insults. What disrepute it is if people think that I kept quiet as I was unable to do anything even though another man had abducted my wife. I fought the battle only in order to demonstrate to the world how capable and strong I am and how capable and strong my friends are! I fought the battle only in order to sustain the reputation of my dynasty. Not for the sake of the wife whom another man had abducted."

Sita understood the point.

She was shocked and stood motionless like the trunk of a tree.

Rama observed Sita *serene*ly. "I have doubts about your chastity. Once he got hold of a beautiful woman like you, will a man let her be without enjoying her. Particularly Ravana! An utterly wicked fellow! If you do not consent….even if forcibly…. he would satisfy his desire… Will he kill his desire for you, bear the *heat of Manmadha* and keep quiet? Am I a fool to believe that Ravana left you as a chaste woman? Our Raghu dynasty is reputed for courage and good qualities. Me… who was born in such a dynasty…. a wife like you who is unchaste…."

Sita trembled with grief.

Such harsh… unbearable words…. *from the mouth* of her husband!.....She was unable to believe her own ears.

She had waited so long a time with the hope that her husband would come and rescue her, that he would be overwhelmed by her conjugal fidelity and that he would embrace her with great love and affection. Finally, was this the result? Will he not accept me? Am I not chaste? Am I not a devoted wife? What a big accusation? In front of so many people! Does my husband suspect me? All my hopes from my childhood…. my conjugal fidelity…. my character…. every thing futile?

Sita looked shocked.

Rama *described and described* the fame and reputation of his dynasty, the courage of his grand and great grand fathers and finally said, "Such a great family is ours! In our family, a woman who has lost her chastity….." He looked sarcastically.

Wailing continuously, Sita closed her ears. "Alas! How unbearably you talk. Unable to hear your words, my *ears are being punctured.* You are talking to me like an illiterate man talking to an illiterate woman. Forgetting that conjugal fidelity is my vow, do you suspect my conduct and character? On seeing some wicked women, are you thinking that all women are like that? What do you think of Sita? Have you not understood my conduct so far?" She looked complainingly with grief.

Rama became furious and looked seriously. "What is your conduct? With whom have you been all these days? You are talking like a devoted wife that that fellow did not do anything to you. Touching you and touching your limbs, did he not abduct you?" He roared.

Sita was depressed with shame. She shrank. "He abducted me. I was a helpless woman. I had no strength to resist. If a base man forcibly carried me away, was it my fault?"

"Do not tell me whose fault it was. Did another man talk to you with lustful emotion?"

"He talked. He tried in all ways to possess me in some manner or the other.... But did I yield? Did I even *raise my eyes* and look at him?

"How do you want me to believe it? What is the proof?"

"Proof? How can I prove? Proof?"

Sita terribly trembled with fear. "Ask Hanuman! He saw with his own eyes how I talked to Ravana. Ask Vibhishana. He had many spies in Asoka vana. Ask Vibhishana's wife. She was always been with me in Asoka vana. Ask all the maid servants who sat around me and watched me.... After knowing everything that happened there, think fairly and decide my conduct. My lord!.... Believe me! There is no fault in me, which you think I have. I am not a sinful woman. My heart has always yearned for you. I swear. If you can not fathom my character to whom can I turn?" Sita was upset.

Sita's grief and Sita's logic are *like blowing a conch in front of a deaf man*. "You had been under the possession of an outside man for a long time whether something happened or not, you are an impure woman. Do you want me to spoil my family reputation by taking such a wife back?" Rama looked at her sarcastically.

Unable to bear such an insult, Sita looked with annoyance. "If you had decided so, why didn't you send that message to me through Hanuman. Had you informed me, "I will not accept you. I will come for the battle only to kill the enemy. Don't harbour any hopes in me", I would have given up my life in front of Hanuman himself. Hanuman gave me courage in many ways that you would definitely come, rescue and treat me affectionately and were grieving out of love and romantic separation for me. Finally, today.... You have insulted me in front of so many people.... so mercilessly... such a helpless woman...." Sita's voice choked with grief.

As Sita spoke complaining words with tears, Rama's anger increased. Looking at her mercilessly, he said, "It is no use to grieve that I have abandoned you without any refuge. You can go anywhere you wish. Stay wherever you want: at Lakshmana, Bharata, Sugriva or Vibhishana's place.

Lakshmana was shocked. All those who heard Rama's words *turned into wood*. "Is it true what I just heard?" Every body looked at each other's face.

Lakshmana's face reddened with anger. "What? What has happened to your brother? This time, he has really lost his brain!.... Why have you stood like this? Why don't you ask your brother?"

Lowering his head and without saying anything to his commonsense, Lakshmana stood.

For Sita, grief was surging like a tidal wave of the sea. She was unable to raise her head due to humiliation. — If it was agreeable to me to leave my husband and live in the shelter of another man, would I not have stayed under Ravana's shelter? An enlightened person who has studied all the scriptures.... such ignorant words? — Sita covered her face with the end part of her sari and wailed continuously.

Sugriva harboured little hope — that Sita might say that she would stay with him! Sita knew that I helped Rama in killing Ravana... Yet, is it not wrong to hope that Sita will stay with me?.... What is wrong in it? When Rama has not found it wrong to ask Sita to stay with me…. is it wrong if I hope for it? She is very beautiful. More than **Ru**ma…. than Tara! A separate mansion at a far off place….” Will it be good if I get a mansion built on Rishyamuka?” he leaned towards the ear of Nala.

“Why?” Nala is surprised.

“You ask me, ‘why?” Somehow, Sugriva remembered the thing and hesitated to tell him.

“Nothing! Nothing! When I saw you, I thought I may build a mansion…. I said casually”, he is confused.

“Enough! Why mansions unnecessarily? Mansions and buildings? Are you not satisfied with so many mansions?”

People — especially many Vanaras – were furious with Rama.

“He had wailed for Sita repeatedly. Now why this vileness?”

“Perhaps he might not have been interested. He might have wailed like that as he thought that we would not come to the battle unless we participate in the battle?”

“You spoke the truth. I would not have participated in the battle if it were not to rescue Sita Devi.”

“Why do you talk such crazy words. We have sold our heads *for the sake of food for the belly*. What can we do if not participate in the battle?”

“When that great lady came to him with so much reverence, why does he say, ‘Dynasty! Dynasty!’ Isn’t our king not living with his wife?”

“We are jungle people. They are civilized…”

“Hell with them! Hell with their civilization! If a man dragged a helpless woman, what can that woman do? Doesn’t he have this much sense?.... Let their civilization go to hell!”

“Stop nuisance. Wherever you gather, you always chatter….”

Rama has again enumerated all the details of his dynasty — how great and how holy, how…. his dynasty is in three worlds, in the universe, in the animate and inanimate world! How great, how valorous, how noble and how…. he is — who was born in such a dynasty! In the enthusiasm of recollecting his nobility, he looked at his wife with disgust and annoyance. “Not only do I have love for you but have dislike for you. It is unbearable for me to see you before my eyes. Even for a moment, I cannot tolerate your doubtful character. Go away quickly…. Go away wherever you want! I am commanding you to go away at once!” He roared and turned his face away.

Trembling with insult, Sita lost her patience and looked with uncontrollable anger. “What if you are a great knowledgeable man? You have talked like a fool who does not hot have the sense of discretion and like a woman. If I had accepted Ravana, would I grieve in Asoka vana immersed in thoughts about you and without adornment, instead of being immersed in pleasures in the harems? You could not grasp this much truth?

I have lived along with you since my young age. I shared your hardships and comforts. I have lived, *doing service to your feet*. I thought you were everything for me. Unable to understand my character, you have accused me…. ugh! Why do I need this life? *To burn it*?

The duty, good qualities, my conjugal fidelity and everything that I have practised so far was in vain. Except death, what is the way out for a woman whom her husband has rejected?” said Sita, *whose cheeks had turned into Lakes*. Looking at Lakshmana, she said, “My child! I will end this unbearable life. Arrange a pyre for me. I cannot live even for one moment with such accusations and blemish. *My child*! Arrange a pyre without any delay." Shedding tears profusely, Sita bowed her head in agony. [434]

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434. Yuddha kanda, the whole of sarga 118: See, in this sarga, everything that happened since Sita came to Rama.

Rama's words and Sita's words do not appear in the form of dialogues.

As per the method, which the poet follows, first Rama talks completely. Later, Sita says whatever she wants to say. The same views, I wrote in the form of dialogues. (*I have not changed the content. I have changed the manner of saying things.*)

See, what the poet is saying about Rama. "Seeing Sita who stood beside him with shyness, Sri Ramachandra — with anger in his heart — (*hridayantargata kroodha = one who has anger in the heart*) began to say as follows:

"*Bhadre*! (O auspicious lady!) Defeating the enemy in the battle, I have possessed you. I have done as per my manliness..... I have annihilated both the enemy and the insult that he caused me simultaneously.... Everybody should know that I have not taken so much trouble for your sake..... With regard to your good conduct, it is doubtful in the view of the world and you are standing before me as my enemy just as a light before a man who has eye-ache.... Which man who has manliness and who belongs to a noble family will accept — with great interest and love — a woman who has stayed in another man's house?..... You have come off the thigh of Ravana only now. You have been looked at by the wicked looks of Ravana. Such a woman as you are — how can I — who was born in a great family and who ought to bring fame to my family — accept you?.... Seeing your beautiful form in his house, Ravana would not keep quiet for long, would he?.... I am not at all interested in you. Go wherever you want to go. I permit you. I am telling you this after thinking about properly. O auspicious lady! I have nothing to do with you. *Twam* = you; *lakshmaneena* = either with Lakshmana; *bharateenaa* = either with Bharata; *yadhaa sukham* = as it is comfortable; *kuru* = do it; *Sugriva* = either with Sugriva; *Vibhishanee* =either with Vibhishana; *aatmanaha* = to you; *sukhaha* = happiness; *yadaaha* = as you like; *manah* = mind; *nivee saya* = keep.

(If Rama accepts his wife who lived in the house of another man and came back; the Raghu dynasty will be defamed. But, Lakshmana and Bharata too belong to Raghu dynasty, don't they? Will the dynasty not be spoiled if they keep their impure sister-in-law with them? If driving away a spoiled wife is a Dharma, they ought to drive away the defiled sister-in-law, shouldn't it? May be only wives must be driven away! This means, Rama does not accept his wife but he will keep Lakshmana or Bharata's wife if they were defiled!

If Rama's wife is spoiled, she will be with Bharata!
If Bharata's wife is spoiled, she will be with Rama!
Lakshmana's wife ..... with Rama!
Rama's wife ....with Lakshmana!
Satrughna's wife ......with Rama!
Rama's wife ....with Satrughna!
If this happens, it will fetche great fame! No defamation!

Perhaps, those who are born in Raghu dynasty talk crazily and they do not know how to talk even a word sensibly!)

"While Rama was talking like this, Sita — who has eyes that resemble an antelope's wet eyes." (*The beauty of those eyes is for the sake of crying!*)

Now, Sita's words: (**Yuddha kanda, sarga 119, up to sloka 19**): "As her body shrunk due to her husband's words which were like sharp points of an arrow, Sita wailed. Wiping her face wet with tears and looking at her husband, Sita said as follows:"

"Warrior! Why are you uttering harsh words — which are not appropriate for you to ➔

'Sita within Sita' is shocked to hear Sita's words. "To die?....Falling on the pyre! How terrible it is!.... Do not be in a hurry, Sita!

To live elsewhere…. going to the parental home…. is better than this death!"

"Tut! How shamelessly you talk! Going to the parental home…. should I spend my life grieving and feeling shy?..... What is the way out….. than this…. for a woman whom the husband has rejected?"

"Alas! Such a horrible death, Sita?"

"It is inevitable. Do I like it…. It is inevitable…. This is the only way *for this birth*!"

Sita lifted her head and saw Lakshmana again. "My child! Arrange the pyre quickly." Shedding tears profusely, she covered her face with the upper part of the sari.

Lakshmana was shocked and looked at his brother.

➔ speak and for me to hear? Why are you talking as if a foolish man talks to a foolish woman? I did not behave as you doubt. I swear! You have to believe me….. Seeing ordinary women you suspect the entire womankind…. An outside man touched me when I was powerless and could not control myself. It was not an act that happened out of my willingness. The fault lies on the god.

Yat =which; *madiidhiinam* = my control; *tat* = such; *mee* = my; *hridayantu* = mind; *twayi* = in you; *vartatee* = is present; *aniiswaraa* = (I was) not free; *paradhiineeshu* = under the control of others; *gaatreeshu* = concerning limbs; *kim* = what; *karishyaami* = can do.

(*Even if it were true that Ravana had molested Sita, this is what Sita should say. If Sita had been molested, it was not her fault. She desires her husband and does not like Ravana. But, according to the values of this society, people do not see whether the relationship with another man had taken place with the willingness of the woman or not. A woman becomes impure even if she is not willing for such relationship. Therefore, Sita's argument — "I was not under my control" — will have no weight.*)

"You sent the warrior Hanuman to see me in Lanka. Why didn't you abandon me then? I would have given up my life then."

"O lion among men! Like a petty man, you followed anger and acted like a woman (*striitwameeva puraskritam*)."

(*This means, a foolish man does not think sensibly. He exhibits anger. Women also do not think sensibly. They exhibit anger. Like women, you are also exhibiting only anger. You are not showing any sense or knowledge. Only womanliness is revealed in you. This is like saying, "you are womanish! You are womanly." Addressing him as 'nara saarduula' (lion among men!). Again, saying, "You are acting like a base man, woman." There is nothing horrible in Sita blaming Rama but it is very horrible to degrade women! The poet makes women speak words that degrade women!*)

"O man of justice! You have not realized my good conduct" — This is how Sita argued to the best of her ability in order to show herself as faultless. "I have not done anything wrong. Believe me! Don't you know my qualities? Do you talk without knowing good and bad? Don't you have mercy? Accept me!" In this manner, Sita talked grieving and requesting the husband to believe her, to show mercy on her, and she is faultless. We should not understand as if she talked with anger, self-respect and carelessness. Such way of talking does not suit the nature of that character. A woman who refutes will not be ready for a fire ordeal or death.

As conditions that enable women to live with self-respect do not exist in feudal society, such features do not form in the nature of women. Such features do not appear even in writings. Sita prays to Rama but does not exhibit self-respect. It is natural to that character. ★

Rama stood unmoved as if Sita jumping into the pyre was acceptable to him.[435]

Grieving, Lakshmana began attempts to arrange the pyre.

"What is this, stupid fellow? What are you doing? Is Sita's death acceptable to you also?" the inner voice questioned him.

Lakshmana said angrily, "Why should it be acceptable to me? There is no one who feels happy more than I if Sita Devi live happily." He wiped his eyes.

"Then why do you make this preparation? What is the use if you simply wail? Why don't you console Sita and pray her not to die? Why don't you tell her that you will support her by serving her? Do you simply watch her die?"

"It is of no use. Sita Devi will not agree to be under others' protection leaving her husband."

"Then, try to the best of your ability to convince your brother. Stop arranging the pyre! Revolt against your brother and argue with him. Argue that Sita was not at fault in her abduction by Ravana! Tell him that your respect for his nobility will vanish if he does not accept his wife. Tell him that you will lose respect and reverence for him, stop serving him and go your own way. Be bold at least to this extent. Oppose injustice!"

"As long as I hear your words, I feel enthusiastic to do as you say.... But.... Nay. I can't do it. Am I such a big man to defy my elder brother's words? Serving the brother is my vow! My goal! It is my duty to act according to my brother's command. There is no loss even if Sita Devi dies in the pyre. She will go to heaven and be happy there."

"Ugh! Wicked man! How cruelly you are talking! You said there is no heaven.... You said there is no god. You said there is no Dharma and Adharma!"

"Owing to my disobedience, I said so but where do heaven and hell.... *dharma* and *adharma* go?"

"How self-deceptive you are! Why should a base fellow like you have intellect? Why knowledge?... I am feeling ashamed for I have lived with you. Arrange the pyre quickly. Burn your soul also in it! Ugh! Stupid fellow!"

Wiping his tears, Lakshmana came near Sita. "*Mother!* As per your wish I have arranged the pyre." He bowed.

"I am ready my child! Now, only the god of fire alone will protect me."

Unable to control her grief, *weeping from eye to the earth continuously*, Sita circumambulated her husband and walked towards the pyre.[436]

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[435] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 119, slokas 21 & 22:** After Sita asked Lakshmana to arrange the pyre, Lakshmana looked at Rama's face. "Therefore, warrior Lakshmana grasped the acceptance of Rama as indicated by his form and arranged a pyre as per his wish."

Sita jumping into the pyre was acceptable to Rama! ★

[436] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 119, slokas from 22 to the end. Whole of sargas 120 & 121:** Coming closer to the pyre, Sita said, "If it is true that my heart has never left Rama and roamed else where, the fire should save me!" Saying so, she jumped into the fire.

All people felt sad.

Then Kubera, Rudra, Yama, Indra and Brahma came to Rama by airplanes from their worlds. (*By then Sita had fallen into the pyre. What will they do, coming now?*)

All of them waved their hands and said, "You are the maker of every thing in this world. You are the most knowledgeable person. Such a man as you — why are you ignoring her when Sita is jumping into the fire?" (*Why have you people ignored so far?*)

Ignoring all that Rama said, "I am Rama. Son of Dasaratha. I am realising that I am a human being. (*I am still thinking I am a human being. So, it is not true!*) Who am I? Whose man I ➔

➔ am? For what purpose did I come? (*What else? Upliftment of the worlds!*) Brahma must tell me all these things. (*Perhaps, he will not believe if any other person tells. Sita is in the fire over there!*)

Brahma began to say. (*O my goodness! How long will he say now!*) Rama! You are Narayana....... You are a sportsman who created the worlds and rule..... You assumed the *Avatar* (form) of *Varaha* (pig) with one horn. (*Horns for pigs*!) In the past, you had conquered all the enemies. Hereafter also, you will conquer them. You are Brahma. You are Vishvaksena. (*One who has armies all over!*) Man.... Best among men! Holder of the sword....Holder of the bow.... Holder of the wheel.... (*Even god has armies, weapons and enemies! Assuming human needs as god's needs and imagining a god!*) You have no destruction.... You have four shoulders..... You are Upendra. (*Perhaps, he is the elder brother of Indra! No use. If he is not Indra, what does it matter whether he is younger brother or elder brother?*) You are Padmanabha.... (*one who has lotus in the navel*). You are Jagannatha. (*Lord of the universe!*) You were one of the Prajapatis in the past. (*One of them? Rama should have been all Prajapatis taken together. So, now, the remaining Prajapatis are as equal as Rama!*) You are the eighth one among Rudras! (*Alas! After seven people? What is great in it?*)....You are the first maker who created the three worlds.... You are *Swayamprabhu* (self-constituted lord).... *Vedatma* (one who knows the spirit of Vedas)... You are *Omkar* (mystic syllable 'Om'). You appear everywhere: in hills, rivers, forests, the entire universe, especially in Brahmans and cows. You are carrying the earth filled with all beings. When the destruction approaches the earth, you are seen lying on a huge serpent Sesha on the waters and bear the three worlds. (*How many times has the earth disappeared so far? The earth disappeared and water remained! Where did water stand?*)...You are the universe with many heads, tongues, eyes and feet. You are the carrier of the world. Sita is Lakshmi. You are Lord Vishnu. You are going to assume the form of Krishna. (*Krishna avatara*). (*Then what sort of gentleman would that Krishna be?*)

Rama! I am (Brahma) your heart. My wife Saraswati is your tongue. (*Brahma! Are you not angry if your wife stays in Rama's mouth?*) All the gods are hair on your body.... *Aswani* gods are your ears. The Sun and the moon are your eyes.... Your vision is day. The closure of your eyes is night. (*It is the imagination of human beings who did not have the knowledge of nature: that it is night when god closes his eyes and it is day when he opens his eyes!*) Your sighs are Vedas! The entire world is your body. Your harshness is the earth. Your anger is fire. Your softness is moon....." While describing this, Brahma says at one place, "Sages say that you are this sort of person (*one who possessed all those features narrated so far!*)

At another place, he says, "Nobody knows about your birth and destruction. Nobody knows who you are."

Brahma is saying, "Nobody knows what is god, how he was born and how he creates". He also says that though we do not know about him, god will save us and the sages suggested to us to seek refuge in god. So Brahma does not know about that god. All are imagining this about god. They believe because the 'elders have told them'.

Again, Brahma's words: "Rama! You were born on earth in the form of human being for the sake of killing Ravana. That task is over. Now, come to Vaikuntha. (*What? Without ruling the kingdom? What happened to Sita who jumped into the fire? By now she must have reached Vaikuntha before Rama!*) Your sight (*people seeing you*), your eulogy (*people praising you*) are not waste. There is no loss and defeat for those who eulogise in the form of ancient epic (*those who sing the oldest ignorant song*). Your devotees will get luxuries not only in this world but also in the other world. (*In any world, it is luxuries that are needed. In this world , we need not* ➔

➔ *give up luxuries. There are crores of devotees who do not get even a little loaf of bread. All these descriptions are meant to mislead such people!*)

Agnihotra, who heard all the words of Brahma, sat Sita on his thigh and rose from the pyre. (*So, it is wrong only when Sita sat on Ravana's thigh. She can sit on the thighs of gods!*)

With red garments, gold jewellery and black curly Hair, Sita was like a young woman with garlands. Agnihotra said to Rama, "Rama! This is your Sita. There is no sin in her. She has not violated you *even in heart*. Meditating about you and believing that you alone are the saviour, she rejected Ravana. I am commanding you to accept this faultless person. Do not say any thing further."

Rama heard words of the god of fire and said after thinking for a little while.

"If I accept Sita who was with Ravana, the world will think that I am a fool and a lustful man, will it not? In order to create confidence of the three worlds in Sita, I kept quiet while Sita was jumping into fire. Ravana cannot even imagine about Sita who is like a flame. Sita does not expect wealth in Ravana's harem. Why do I abandon Sita? I will follow your friendly advice because you are worshipped by the world." Saying so Rama accepted Sita.

Rama is saying that he knew that Sita was pious, didn't he? Then, why should he have 'anger within his heart' (*hridayantargata krrodham*) while talking to Sita? He should have had 'love' in his heart, shouldn't he? While Sita was crying, Rama's heart should have been upset that he was abusing an innocent person, shouldn't he? Just as adding fuel to fire, why should his anger have increased?

As it is true that a husband will be extremely angry with his wife who has stayed with another man, the poet depicted that anger first. Again, to project Rama as a good man, he has changed like this.

Rama has contempt for Sita as well as fear of the public opinion. Both are the same. They are not two different things. Generally, whatever the public (that is large number of people) considers wrong, an individual mind also considers it wrong.

It is the value of the world that a woman ought not to have physical relationship with a man other than the husband." (*This means, it is a value, which all persons in society believe. As the husband is also an individual in society, he too accepts the same value. He forms his likes and dislikes in accordance with that value.*)

Why does Rama fear the world? Because there is no value in the world according to which a husband does not accept his wife if she has relations with a man other than him (the husband).

If the poet has the intention of projecting Rama as a noble man, he should not say that Rama had '*hridayantaragata kroodha*' (anger inside his heart!) As soon as he saw Sita, Rama ought o have felt sad and affectionate and said to her, "Sita! I know that it was not your fault that Ravana abducted you. I believe that you did not desire him. I do not have objection to accepting you. But the scriptures find fault if a husband accepts his wife who was in the house of another man. I follow the values of those scriptures. So, I will not accept you".... Even this is wrong. But, here is no other way to project Rama as a noble man. But, it is not appropriate if the poet first says hat Rama has anger in his heart and later says, 'No, Rama has no doubt at all'.

If we want to understand the scene of Sita's fire ordeal, we have to understand that Sita was eady to commit suicide (In *Ramayana*, we find suicides by jumping into the pyre at many places. Many sages fell into the pyre. Sabari too fell into the pyre) and elderly people persuaded and onvinced Rama. It was common in society that all the elders gathered at one place and solved he disputes between wives and husbands. Similarly, all the elders talked to Rama and made him ccept Sita. This is what had happened in the story.

★

All the elders gathered around Rama and each one of them told him in their own way. The only thing that every body said was that Sita was innocent and a great devoted wife.

Lowering his head, Rama listened to others' *serene*ly.

"Rama! Sita is a woman of great character. That wicked man dared in your absence. As she was weak, she could not resist that wicked man. There is no fault of her. Ravana could confine your wife under his control but could not achieve anything. Your dutiful wife did not yield to that man despite his many attempts to lure her. She kept her *five lives* (hopes) on you and waited for your arrival."

Rama kept silent and was lost in thought.

Everybody believed the words of Hanuman and Vibhishana that Ravana could not possess Sita. It may be fair if I too believe them…. If Sita had acted as per Ravana's wish, why would she grieve?

On seeing people feeling that Sita was not at fault, the fear for the world receded in Rama's heart and the contempt, which he had gradually enhanced, began to recede.

Since the moment she had married him…. her service, character…. conjugal fidelity…. forest life…. grief….. she bore lot many things!

"Rama! Listen to my words! You need not doubt Sita Devi any more. That great lady was ready to die and has proved her purity. Will a wicked woman be ready to die when she cannot bear her husband's refusal. Think for yourself. You are a great knowledgeable man. Meritorious. You have read all the scriptures. You are acquainted with Dharma (justice) and Adharma (injustice). What is the need for others to tell you? You have shown so much resistance since you were born in the Raghu dynasty. You were prepared even to abandon your wife but did not agree to lose the reputation of your dynasty. If it were another man, would he have shown such manliness?.... You should also give up your adamant attitude. There is no fault in Sita…."

Rama's face blossomed with smiles, gradually.

His heart was overwhelmed with the pride of success.

There was no one who would say, "Sita is not pure. Do not accept her!" Then why should I have any objection.

Rama saluted all the elders. "However great I may be, I must be afraid of the world, mustn't I?.... Can I do something which is not good for the world?" He submitted with humility.

"Rama! What a noble man you are! It is good for the world if you accept your dutiful wife. If you live happily with your wife, the world will be happy and not….."

"I know always that my dutiful wife is a noble woman. I too believe that Sita would not desire Ravana's riches and wealth. Another man cannot do any thing to my dutiful wife. If any man thinks of her in a vile manner even in his mind, he would be ruined. My wife is *like a flame*! I know. But I hesitated that the world may think otherwise. If I accepted Sita in a hurry, the world would say, "Having been born in a great family, what a base thing Rama has done!" The world would say that I brought back a defiled wife. It will call me a fool, a lustful man. That's why, I hesitated and was ready to abandon my wife. After elders like you have accepted that Sita is faultless, can I defy your words as my duty? I will surely follow your advice. I will accept my wife." Rama said and looked at Sita from the corners of his eyes.

Sita was listening to all the words of Rama in wonder. She was pleasantly surprised. — I thought my husband had not grasped my character but that great man has understood every thing…. It is not that my husband was not aware of my conjugal fidelity…. but he was afraid of the world…. However righteous a man may be, he should fear the world, shouldn't he?

It is nice that my husband showed restraint until all the elders had discussed the good and bad aspects of the matter.

All have witnessed my self-sacrifice that I was ready to die, out of my grief that my husband had refused me.

My husband's sense of restraint as well as my character have revealed themselves to the world. I felt very angry that that pious man is harsh and merciless but his behaviour is noble. All people praised my faultlessness. They appreciated my husband's manliness. What a great fame for both the families! Will people not talk greatly about my conjugal fidelity in Lanka, Kishkindha, Ayodhya and many more countries? Had my husband accepted me as soon as he saw me, would I have got so much fame… so much sacrifice? He has always been a righteous man.

"Sita! Why are you feeling over joyed, remembering the righteousness of your husband? Every thing is all right since all people have agreed. Otherwise, what would have happened? Had elders told him not to accept you, he would have kept quiet, wouldn't he? Though he is throwing the entire blame on to he world as if he were afraid of the world, do you think that he does not have doubt about you?" Sita was listening to some one.

"No. My husband has never doubted me"

"Then why should he not tell you the same hing? — 'I do not doubt you. I am afraid of the world…..'

"What is this talk? He knows every thing as to what to do…"

"Don't get angry…. He is saying he will accept you. Will you accept him?"

"Oh! What do I need more than that? Why won't I agree? Have I not been praying to a housand gods for the sake of that piety? Why do you ask this?"

"Are you really happy? Are you willing? Tell me the truth!"

"Happy?.... I don't know!.... Why not? He is my husband! My lord! He is everything for me!"

"All right! But don't you feel hurt to see his face? How he blamed you! How harshly…. how insultingly….. Have you forgotten it all so soon?"

"Not for…. gotten. But if it is the husband….. whether he punishes…. shows mercy…. A husband is everything for women, isn't he?"

"Yes! Husband! Hus…. band…. But….."

"Why do you still say, 'But'? Do not trouble me. Now I am happy"

Agnihotra came near Sita who was immersed in thought.

Soothing her head, he said, "My child! Your husband is willing to accept you with mercy. Come on my child!" Saying so, Agnihotra held Sita's hand and took her along with him.

Feeling shy, Sita bowed and stood in front of Rama.

Putting Sita's hand in Rama's hand, Agnihotra blessed both of them, "You couple! Be happy forever! My child! Sita! Your husband is your god! You live, *concentrating your whole heart* on the service to your husband! Rama! Accept your dutiful wife with mercy. Both of you, live happily!"

"Sita…. has gone to her husband. Have you observed?"

"Poor girl, what can she do otherwise?"

"If it were our women, they would have scolded scathingly and gone to their parental home by now, wouldn't they? I think these women do not feel ashamed! Civilized people!"

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[Translation: **B.R. Bapuji**]

Link-10

Between the 14th Story and the 15th Story

[The **14th** story ended with Rama 'accepting' Sita. The **15th** story begins when Rama leaves Lanka. This is the link between the two stories.]

After Rama 'accepted' Sita, Rudra came in an airplane. Dasaratha was also there in the airplane. Rudra said to Rama, "Rama! Because we are lucky, you have completed the task of killing Ravana. You have removed fear from all the worlds. Now go to Ayodhya! (The *exile in the forest is now over. So, this forest life is originally meant to occupy Kishkindha and Lanka as subsidiary kingdoms. By the time this task is over, the forest life is also over!*) Console Bharata who is grieving for you (*No mention of Satrughna!*), meet all your mothers, have your coronation, make all your friends happy, give birth to children for the expansion of the Ikshvaku dynasty, perform the Ashwamedha sacrifice, earn fame and reputation, give money to all Brahmins (*braahmaneebhyaha* = for Brahmins; *dhanam* = money; *dattvaa* = give) and go to heaven!

See the king in this airplane. He is your father Dasaratha! (*Why hasn't this gentleman not spoken so far?*) Since you protected your father's vow for truth, your father went to heaven. (*Is this gentleman a king even in heaven? After he went there, did he change so much that even his sons could not recognise him?*) You and your brother salute your father."

Dasaratha was radiant in silk garments seated in the airplane. (*The light of the windows of the airplane might have been reflected on his face!*)

Rama and Lakshmana saluted their father.

On seeing Rama, who is greater than his life, Dasaratha felt very happy. Dasaratha, who sat on a beautiful seat, sat Rama on his thigh. (*putram = son; ankam = thigh; aaroopya = sat. As Lakshmana is younger, Dasaratha ought to have taken him to his bosom, oughtn't he? Why only Rama on the thigh? Do you say, "Poor fellow! How can the old man make both of them sit on his thigh?" Then, he ought to have sat Lakshmana. But the father has fascination for Rama!*)

Dasaratha hugged his son. "Rama! I am not at all interested in enjoying pleasures in heaven leaving you here. Believe my words. I am telling you the truth. (*So, he has not stopped speaking lies even after going to heaven! Do liars alone go to heaven?*) I am very happy to see you destroy the enemies. All the words, which Kaika said about sending you to the forest, are still in my heart. Just as Ashtavakra helped his father in his salvation, you too have helped me in my salvation. (*Ashtavakra's father was Ekapada. Once, Ekapada was about to be defeated in an argument with 'Vandi' in Janaka's assembly. Ashtavakra entered the argument, defeated Vandi and enabled his father to win. This is the salvation of his father by Ashtavakra! This, the poet did not mention. This is the translators' elaboration.*) Now I think gods have put hurdles in your coronation ceremony for the sake of killing Ravana. (*Then, all of you now have to praise Kaika, don't you? You have to* ***slap your cheeks*** in repentance *for abusing Kaika all these years, don't you?*) Kausalya will see you in Ayodhya. How fortunate she is! (*Why don't you also go? Anyway, you go about in an airplane?*) People will be blessed on seeing your coronation. (*People will gain nothing by *seeing your son's coronation. Your son alone will be blessed on seeing his own coronation!*) Rama! You have to meet Bharata who is affectionate, valorous, clean and virtuous. You have faced many hardships having lived in the forest for fourteen years. (*Why didn't you come and express your sympathy when he was facing hardships? You have come now with excitement because he is going to be the king!*) Rule the kingdom for long", Dasaratha blessed Rama. (*Just as you ruled, this gentleman also will rule!*)

Saluting his father, Rama bowed respectfully. "Out of anger for Kaika, you said you would abandon Kaika and his son. But you have to be merciful in respect of Kaika and her son. Your terrible curse must not affect them", he requested Dasaratha.[437] (*Then what about your curses? Didn't you ever talk anything bad about Kaika?*)

Dasaratha said, 'Okay' to Rama's advice and hugged Lakshmana. (*Sitting Rama on the thigh! As it won't look nice if he does not do any thing in the case of Lakshmana, he hugged him now for a while!*) "Lakshmana! On seeing you doing service to Rama, I feel very happy. By the grace of Sri Rama, you will get fame in this world and heaven in the other world. (*Those two do not appear to the eyes. They are lies. Carry on!*)

Spend your life doing service to Rama! You will be blessed with good things. (*Lakshmana! You will get zero! Hereafter your life will be that of a slave!*)

Gods and sages in the three worlds worshipped Rama. They said that Brahma's form had emerged as Sri Rama. (*utkam = was said. Although he went to heaven, Dasaratha is not aware of this. He says, "Some body said it."*) Lakshmana! Live by serving Rama", Dasaratha said to Lakshmana again and finished talking. (*Dasaratha spoke to Lakshmana merely to tell him to serve Rama. That's all!*)

After talking to Lakshmana, Dasaratha looked at Sita and said, "Do not be angry with Rama for he said he would abandon you. He did it for your good. (*So, falling in the pyre is a very good thing. Dasaratha is asking Sita not to be angry with Rama for he said he would abandon her. Which means, Sita could, in fact, be angry with Rama for he said so! This is an appropriate reason for getting angry!*) O girl with beautiful eye brows! (*The poet used the world '**subhru**'. This means, 'woman, with beautiful eye brows!' It seems the eye brows of the daughter-in-law are appealing to Mr.*

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437. Yuddha kanda, sarga 122, slokas 25 & 26:

"Saluting with folded hands, Rama said to Dasaratha as follows: O Righteous man! You told Kaika that you would abandon her along with her son. You should be gracious with regard to Kaika and Bharata. That terrible curse must not touch Kaika and Bharata".

When did Dasaratha say he would abandon Kaika? Before Rama started for leaving forest life! Later, Dasaratha died. Exile in the forest is over. Fourteen years have passed. Now, Rama is saying to his father, "You said you would abandon Kaika. Don't abandon her." What is this abandonment by a person who has died? May be it is like saying, "Turn into a ghost and harass Kaika. Don't leave Kaika!" The poet has a strong desire at every step to make Rama a great man. It is the poet's anxiety to say, "Rama did not have anger for Kaika, you know! He wishes Kaika's happiness. He told his father not to trouble Kaika, you know! Oh, see how noble Rama is!" In order to glorify Rama, the poet has been any way saying, "He saved Ahalya. He sent Sabari to heaven. He did this, he did that." Why should he bring in Kaika's reference now by saying, "Rama wished Kaika's welfare?" Its implication is: 'Rama in fact must have lot of anger for Kaika since Kaika did so much harm to him. But, as Rama is a noble person, he wished her welfare without being angry even though she deserves anger! Since the day on which the coronation was stopped, we have been noticing what an utter lie this is!

Rama has been abusing Kaika every moment hasn't he? When there are many people around, he showers reverence on Kaika as a very good man. Should he not have a brain even to shower that reverence? Dasaratha, who had passed away a long time ago, should not abandon Kaika, he says!

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father-in-law! The fellow who examined so much — what more did he see? Why doesn't he say, "Woman with patience!" "O noble woman!"

'Your eye brows are beautiful', he says. Thank god! He did not say, 'O girl with beautiful breasts!' Eyebrows and nipples — do these constitute poetry?) Others need not teach you that you ought to serve your husband. I am telling you this because I am obliged to. (*This is like Mr. father-in-law preaching sermons to the daughter-in-law!*) Your husband is your god. Live by worshipping the husband."

After saying thus, looking radiant, Dasaratha left for Indra's world in the airplane. (*Why such a hurry? Can't he wait for some time seeing his sons? May be Rambha will be present even in Indra's world!*)

Then Indra asked Rama, "Ask for whatever you want." (*It is all right. But have you checked, Dasaratha has taken away your airplane?*)

Rama asked with humility, (*Rama! Ask Indra's kingdom!*) "All the Vanaras who died in the battle must regain their life. All of them must go back to their homes happily. In the areas where Vanaras inhabit, fruits and roots must be available even out of season. Rivers must flow."[438]

Indra felt a bit uncomfortable and said, "Rama! The boon that you asked for is a very difficult one. Yet, I will give it because I do not go back on my word and say one thing here and another thing there."

All the dead Vanaras regained their lives and rose up happily without wounds. "What is this?" all the Vanaras wondered. They saluted Rama.[439]

All the gods flew up, stood in the sky and said, "Rama! Console Sita and be happy!" Saying so, they left flying toward heaven. (*Even Devendra too had to go flying, as he did not have airplane!*)

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[Translation: **B. R. Bapuji**]

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438. Yuddha kanda, sarga 123, sloka 8: *akaaleebaapi* = during the dry reason; *muulaanicha* = roots; *phalaanicha* = fruits, *nadyuscha* = rivers, *tisteeyaha* = be present.

Fruits and water must be available always. Such places are needed —These are the wishes of primitive human beings. These are great boons in the imagination.

At the time when he was shooting an arrow at the sea, Rama himself gave the boon to *Samudra* that good fruits and water would be available in Marukaantaaram, didn't he? Now, he is asking Indra a boon for the same!

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439. Yuddha kanda, sarga 123, sloka 16: All are surprised because all the dead persons regained life. *vaanaram* = Vanaras; *vismitaaha* = surprised; *babhuuvuha* = are.

Dead persons regaining life is unnatural. This is a matter that should evince surprise. But when there are gods and goddesses who can do many miracles right in front of their eyes, why should people wonder? Gods come from the sky and leave. The god of fire came out of the pyre and talked. When such things happened daily, people should take it as a natural thing and should not wonder, should they? Even if dead persons regain their life, it must be as if a doctor treated a disease. Why should the people wonder?

Though the poet is writing about miracles, he himself is wondering a lot. Similarly, he was astonished at the building of a bridge across the sea. To him, any miracle is strange. This means, all miracles, in fact, are written from the imagination of the poet and they are not actually known facts of life. Dead persons regaining life does not happen in nature. The poet also knows that it does not happen. Hence the fancy of dead persons regaining life. And this is a surprising thing. He expresses the same surprise every time.

Miracles, gods, heavens, flying — every thing is the poet's imagination. Though he himself imagined and wrote stories on miracles, the poet himself is wondering at the miracles that happen in the stories.

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Story-15

Rama in the Place of Sandals!

Rama's coronation celebrations are being held grandly — in Rama's mind!

In Ayodhya.... freedom from this attire of a sage.... coronation... all the elders, the wealthy, businessmen, scholars, priests in the city will gather around me with joy.... Will they be happy with my kingship? Will they want Bharata's kingship to continue? Will my kingship be more advantageous to them than Bharata's? Has Bharata consolidated his position during the last fourteen years?.... After such a long time... will Bharata agree to give up his kingship? A man who has never associated with politics and who has led a luxurious life.... will he not desire the same luxurious life again?...Will he want the same high position for a long time?....Will he think with such knack as to attract all the important people in the kingdom?.... Why doesn't he think so? Infatuation for a higher position will teach one any amount of knack! He might have made all the efforts in favour of his stability. Unless it is my illusion... a man who has been a king for so long a period — will he handover the reins of the kingdom to me willingly.... smoothly....? I should not believe. We cannot believe.

But, Bharata.... with a broad mind... long ago.... prepared to sacrifice the kingdom for my sake! About such a noble man.... me... thinking like this?

That had happened a long time ago! Will that reverence have remained until today? I should not believe. Was it not Kaika's wish? She wished that by the time her rival wife's son returned from the exile, her son will have consolidated himself in the kingdom and become invincible, wouldn't she? Has it happened so?**[440]**

Lowering his head restlessly, Rama sighed.

"Lord Rama!" Vibhishana bowed obediently and saluted him. "All the elders including your father have agreed that your forest life is over and you can enter the city. There is nothing wrong about it. Every thing is ready for your adornment. Silk garments, ornaments, scents, garlands.... every thing is ready. Many beautiful women are waiting for the fortune of serving at your feet. Your arrival into the city alone is late!" Vibhishana submitted.

Rama *serene*ly raised his head and looked. "Vibhishana! Since you are a knowledgeable fellow, you well understand as to when and how to respect me. I am happy at your devotion.... But....", he sighed. "There... in Ayodhya... Bharata will be waiting for me treating each moment as an age! My brother is a very great man. One who ought to have immersed himself in pleasures is leading the most difficult life of a sage. Leaving such a brother, how can I adorn myself?... Spare me! Make arrangements for the bathing of all important persons like Sugriva, Angada and Hanuman. They should be adorned well. Whereas I will do it only in Ayodhya. Now I must start off quickly. It takes lot of time to travel. Make travel arrangements at once!" He hurried the travel on.

Vibhishana again with humility said, "Lord! You need not worry about the travel. The Pushpaka plane, which will take you to any long distance in a few seconds, is ready for you. The moment you start here, it will take you to Ayodhya the next moment. Do not be in a hurry about your departure. Be merciful on me, stay here for some time happily and accept my

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440. For the basis to say that these kinds of thoughts about Bharata are going on in Rama's mind, see in the subsequent part of this story! ★

hospitality along with your army. I am always your servant. Command me whatever services you want!", he prayed.

Rama smiled. Rama had wondered if Vibhishana might show disobedience after he became the king. But there was no such tendency. He behaved with the same humility and loyalty as he had in the past. It seems that, amidst his joy and excitement of becoming the king, he remembered the person out of whose mercy he had become the king. "Vibhishana! You have worshipped me in all ways. There is no dearth of your service to me. Don't worry that I have not noticed your humility and loyalty! My heart is eager to see my brother. When I was at Chitrakuta, he had come to me back to Ayodhya. As I did not agree, he went back disappointed.... I do not know how he is! How much he is suffering with the duties of the kingdom! [441]

It is very long since I left my country. I am very anxious to see my mothers, relatives, important citizens and people. There is no other reason but this for not staying in your kingdom. (*I will come another time!*)

I have nothing left to do here anymore. I have annihilated your enemies and put Lanka in your hands. (*What sort of Lanka? Lanka, which turned into coal after everything in it, burnt down!*) I have given you all riches and wealth. Enjoy all these pleasures to your satisfaction. Immersed in pleasures, do not forget royal affairs", he joked.

Vibhishana bowed his head with humility and looked at Sugriva as if saying, "Did you hear what he said?"

Earlier, Sugriva had confided many a time to Vibhishana about Rama's arrogance with hurt feelings. "Vibhishana! Why does he always say, 'The kingdom that I gave to you. The kingdom that I gave to you!' Did he get it for us from elsewhere? You got your brother's kingdom and I got my brother's. What do you say?"

In this aspect, Vibhishana was also angry at Rama. "Yes! I too have been noticing that. He always mentions in some manner whether or not we have remembered the help he gave us."

"Do you think that he helped us for nothing? Did he help us out of mercy on us and without any gain for him? However subordinate and obedient I am, he keeps ridiculing me on one pretext or the other. If I try to say something he looks at me as if saying, 'You are an illiterate fellow. What do you know?'.... I am confiding this to you casually. Keep this in your mind. Do not talk about this elsewhere!"

Vibhishana remembered all the words of Sugriva. He looked at Sugriva as soon as Rama said, 'I gave you the kingdom.' Sugriva nodded as if saying, "Yes, I too have heard it."

Out of fear that Rama might understand his inner feelings, Vibhishana exhibited more humility. "Yes, your lordship! I will make your travel arrangement right now. Is there any thing more that you command?", he waited for the command of Rama.

Rama thought for a while, lifted his head and said smilingly, "Vibhishana! Give appropriate gifts to all the important Vanaras

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441. Yuddha kanda, sarga 124, slokas 5 to 7, 19 & 20: See, what Rama says about Bharata while talking to Vibhishana here and what he says later while talking to Hanuman.

What he said here: "That young man — who is righteous, worthy to be happy, delicate and truthful is troubling himself for my sake."

"Following the Dharma, I am not interested in bathing, garments and ornaments while leaving such Bharata. My heart is in a hurry to see Bharata who came from Ayodhya to Chitrakuta to take me back. Bharata begged me sincerely to take me back. I did not heed his words.... Pray to important persons like Sugriva (*Sugriva mukhyaan*) to take a bath. (*Bathing and hospitality are only for big people, not for all Vanaras!*)

Here, Rama is talking as if he has a good opinion of Bharata. See how he speaks later in another context!

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according to their status. For conquering Lanka, they alone fought with great strength and ability. You would not have got all these riches, wealth, luxuries and kingship without their help." Saying so, he looked at Vibhishana with a sidelong glance.

Vibhishana heard it without expressing any feeling. Thinking about who those important Vanaras, how many hundreds of them there were, what sort of gifts he will have to give and what the cost will be and so on, Vibhishana stood silently as if he were not pleased with such an idea.

Rama, who observed Vibhishana's attitude, frowned and said *serene*ly, "Vibhishana! The Vanaras will feel extremely happy if you felicitate them out of gratitude that they have helped you. If you do it, you will only get fame. All the people will talk about you as virtuous, merciful and sacrificing. That's why I am telling you so much, you know!" He looked impatiently as if he said, "Is my order not enough? Need I tell you so much about all this?"

Vibhishana felt upset. "Rama! Whatever you utter is a command for me! I will get things done as you order!" Saying so, he called his ministers and asked them to carry out this business of felicitations.[442]

Again, Rama remembered Bharata's rule and hurried Vibhishana. "Vibhishana! Now I have to start. Get the airplane."

The Pushpaka airplane came and stopped in front of Rama. It shone greatly with beautiful flags, musical anklets and ornaments. It was full of beautiful seats, beds and so on.

The Vanaras gathered round the airplane and looking at it from top to toe in great wonder."

"How will it fly?"

"Don't we watch birds? May be like that!"

"They have life! What does this have?

"I do not know. What magic it might have?"

Rama, Sita and Lakshmana boarded the plane.[443]

Rama got into the plane and sat in it without talking to anybody.

When the plane came, Sugriva and Vibhishana stood in a corner and were astonished at the attitude of Rama.

"He is going to have coronation in Ayodhya. Why doesn't he ask us even if casually to come there?"

Sugriva turned towards the plane and wondered further. He has so far been expecting that Rama would definitely ask him to come to Ayodhya.

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442. Yuddha kanda, sarga 125, slokas 4 to 8: Rama preached his responsibility to Vibhishana. "The invincible Lanka has been conquered since these Vanaras fought without fear for their life and without turning their backs in the battle. Felicitate them by giving gems, money and ornaments. (*This does not mean that all may be felicitated. See whom should Vibhishana felicitate.*)

"Those who are eligible for respect (*sanmaarham*) and those who rule Vanaras will be happy, after you felicitate them". (*Rama is suggesting to felicitate the king, his ministers and such other administrators. They alone are eligible for felicitation.*)

It seems Vibhishana is not happy about all this expenditure on felicitations. So Rama is trying to convince him, "All will realise that you are merciful, charitable and famous." Rama says, "You will get fame!"

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443. There is nothing wrong if the Pushpak airplane flew in Valmiki's '*Ramayana*' since it is fiction. (Mythology). But in a story which we understand from a realistic point of view, Pushpak plane should not be present. We have to simply understand that Rama returned from Lanka in a boat, bullock-cart or horse carriage. As there is some story connected with Pushpaka airplane, I am retaining it here as it is. This does not mean that we too need believe that Rama went in the Pushpaka airplane.

Notice the route along which the Pushpak plane travelled!

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He said to me, 'You are my younger brother.... You are my friend....' But sat in the plane without calling me even casually."

Looking at the plane with a sidelong glance, Vibhishana said to Sugriva, "Let me speak whatever I have in my mind. Don't think otherwise.... He made me give gifts to all of you, didn't he?.... Well, did you not help him? Should he also not give some to you, whatever he can? Should he not tell you something: that he will take you to his country or send gifts to your country? Look! How he is quiet, evading you as if he is not concerned with you!" Vibhishana expressed his agony.

"Who cares for the gifts.... See, he has not asked us even casually to come for his coronation! Shall we ask him? Let us go and see how his country looks like!"

"Tut! Will it be nice if we ask and then go?"

"What is nice? *Stubbornness is the right medicine for a stubborn wretch*! Let us go and ask."

Sugriva and Vibhishana went to the place where Rama sat and stood before him with folded hands.

Looking at everybody with *serene* looks, Rama nodded his head and opened his mouth. "Now, all of you take leave! I permit you. Sugriva! You helped me and kept your promise. I felt happy. Now go to Kishkindha and be happy." Then he looked at Vibhishana with a smile. "Vibhishana! Enjoy the kingdom. None of the enemies can do any harm to you. Even if gods descend, they cannot do any harm to you. Now, I will start." He looked at everybody as if he was saying, "All of you look at me well now."**[444]**

Sugriva and Vibhishana looked at each other's face.

Sugriva was *burning with anger* at Rama. But he was curiously interested in boarding the plane. "Ramayya! I too will come to your kingdom along with my ministers. There... without giving you any trouble.... we will behave properly. We will not stay long with you there. We will return after seeing your coronation...." Sugriva stood *rubbing his hands in shyness*.

Rama turned *serene* for a moment and was lost in thought. When I was in the forests, it was all right even if I made friends with these tribal people. If I take them to the city of Ayodhya.... People and important persons will see these tribals and.... that I lived all these

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444. Yuddha kanda, sarga 125, slokas 13 to 17: Rama sat in the plane and said to great valorous Sugriva and Vibhishana as follows: "Best among Vanaras! You have completed the task of your friend. Take my permission, you may leave for the places you like. Sugriva! You — who is afraid of *Adharma* — have completed the task which a friend ought to. You will reach Kishkindha soon along with your troops. Vibhishana! Live in Lanka, which I have given you. Even gods who come along with Indra cannot deny you."

It was Rama's opinion that Vibhishana ought to give gifts to Vanaras but he need not give those who had helped him. Because, he had helped Sugriva first. Now, Sugriva has reciprocated and helped him in return. He has discharged his duty. So, Rama need not give him gifts.

It is not the case with Vibhishana. He did not give any help to Sugriva first. Sugriva alone helped Vibhishana and conquered Lanka for him. Therefore, Vibhishana ought to have given gifts to Sugriva.

Rama is reminding him of the agreement between Sugriva and himself, "You have kept your word!" This is as if Rama was saying to Sugriva, "You helped me since I first helped you! You have not given me any help without reciprocity.

Now, Rama asks everybody to go their own way. The airplane will go via Kishkindha, wouldn't it? Why doesn't he drop off Sugriva there? He knows all morals. Why doesn't he know this moral?

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days with such uncivilized people….

But….. in a way this is also good?.... These tribals will see the speciality of my kingdom, luxuries, wealth, armed troops….. and wonder….. and live under my domination *without uttering a single word*!

The next moment, Rama recovered from his thought and *sprinkled a smile*. "Sugriva! If all of you want to come to my kingdom, what more joy will I have?..... Start surely. Ask all your ministers to come. Vibhishana! You too start with your ministers. You can see our country. All of you board the plane!" Rama hurried them on.[445]

All the big people rushed into the plane and sat in it.[446]

Rama said to the airplane *serene*ly, "I have to go to Ayodhya! Fly!"

The airplane bowed obediently and rose up in the air.

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The Pushpaka plane was moving like a bullock cart in the sky.

With the shouting and laughing of Vanaras, the sky was becoming a *laughing world*.

The moment he boarded the plane, Sugriva hugged Nila. "Oh! How is it flying? Do you think it will not fall?" He looked down *with eyes wide open*.

Looking with a side-glance at Sita, who sat beside him, Rama with a *serene* smile, was showing every thing seen on their way. "Sita! This is the battle field. Here I killed Ravana for your sake. Look! Here I killed Kumbhakarna…. Here Nila killed Prahasta. Look, here Hanuman killed Dumraksha… Here Sushena killed Vidyunmali. Look here, Lakshmana killed

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445. Yuddha kanda, sarga 125, slokas 19 to 26:

Rama, initially, did not ask any one to come to his country. He asked every one to go wherever they would like to go. "When Rama said so (*that is, when he asked everybody to leave*), Vanaras and Vibhishana said to him with salutation: "Rama! We would like to come to Ayodhya. You should take us with you. We will move about carefully in the cities and gardens. Seeing your coronation and saluting the feet of Kausalya, we will soon return to our places."

Have you noticed what the Vanaras were saying? "We will not destroy gardens and villages. We will soon return after your coronation", they were begging Rama to take them along with him.

For fighting battles and carrying messages, the Vanaras are great, valorous, efficient and intelligent! But, for coming to Ayodhya, they are merely forest monkeys! Is Rama afraid that they will spoil the gardens and backyards? Rama agreed to take them along after everybody asked him.

"When the Vanaras and Vibhishana said so…. virtuous Rama said as follows: 'I will be happy to go to Ayodhya along with you….. Sugriva! Board the plane quickly along with Vanaras. Vibhishana boarded the plane along with the ministers…. The best Pushpaka plane went in the sky route by the order of Rama." (*Rama is exhibiting royalty while boarding Ravana's plane!*)

Before they asked him if they could come, shouldn't Rama have invited the Vanaras happily thus, "All of you come to our country."

The poet has a very slight feeling for Vanaras. He has a petty mind to ridicule the Vanaras but he did not think that by doing so, Rama will appear an ungrateful and discourteous man! ★

446. Yuddha kanda, sarga 125, last sloka:

"Vanaras and Rakshasas sat in the plane comfortably without feeling crowded. (*yadhaa sukham*). Which means, let any number of people board it, the plane will not be crowded and still some space remained. All those who board the plane will have space to sit! ★

Indrajit here only.... Here Angada.... Here Jambavan....[447]

Look! Here Mandodari came along with rival wives and cried for her husband.... Look here. We halted here before the battle began.... Here we crossed the sea... Here...." He suddenly Rama lowered his voice and asked, "Well, at what distance did Ravana stand?" He looked sideways.

Sita turned pale, felt ashamed and lowered her head.

Rama resumed, "Look below.... Here only, Vibhishana made friends with me. Look, I travelled with the Vanara army along this path.... Why have you not answered my question? Did he ever touch you?.... I know he was a wicked man. What could be your fault?" He looked fondly at Sita.

Sita felt slighted and lowered her head. Does he still doubt me? Does he not believe in my conjugal fidelity? Does he still have doubt regarding me? Why can't he say, "How many hardships you had faced! Why can't he say, "I spent my time grieving for you." About me.... again... again... and again doubt?

"Why are you not speaking?....Look below. There are many flowers that you like. See the birds all on the trees like bunches of flowers! Look at the clouds like the upper part of your sari!"

"Lord! On that day.... when I sent you for that deer.... I abused Lakshmana for not going to help you and sent him away from the hermitage. How sad I felt later!"

"Sita! Everything that happened has for our good. Who can change fate?.... I have always believed that we would meet happily again... Is Ravana handsome? Although I saw him in the battlefield, how can we notice handsomeness etcetera amidst anger, shields and helmets? In Asoka vana... when you saw him... you must have seen all his features."

Sita got an idea. The more she ridiculed another man, the more her husband felt happy. "Lord! What sort of handsomeness is it? How can such a wicked man have handsomeness?"

"If he were handsome?"

"Yet, how am I concerned? Am I not a devoted wife? Who can be handsomer than you?"

Rama laughed disappointed. "Look, over there! Those Sala trees...", he immersed in describing himself the beauty of the forests.[448]

Wondering at the flying of the plane, Sugriva was still holding Nila. "Do you think this will not fall anywhere?.... Will this really reach the destiny? How naughty is this! This has been flying at a stretch like a bird!.... Whoever made this.... Who do you think made this?" Turning at Vibhishana, Sugriva hit Nila in his flank.

Nila, who had just gone to sleep, got annoyed at that hitting on the flank. "Oh! What is this?" he turned and slept again.

Sugriva said to Vibhishana, "It seems there are many people who make airplanes in your country! Get a plane made for us. It must have beautiful mirrors, you see!.... Well, do you think this plane has never fallen, even once? Ravana is a very interesting person! He had all beautiful things. But he could not enjoy them, of course! One should be lucky to enjoy anything...." As Hanuman's nails pricked his buttock, Sugriva shut his mouth at once.

Sugriva grasped the matter when he noticed Vibhishana put on an angry face. "Whatever one does, he would get fittingly. Can a sinner escape the result of his sins?" He looked at Vibhishana with a smiling face as if he said, "Has your anger gone now?"

Rama was still showing the specific spots on the earth below to Sita.

"Look over there! The one that is seen at a distance is Kishkindha. This is Sugriva's kingdom. Here, I killed Vali and ...."

"Lord! It will be nice if we take Sugriva's

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447. The plane is going along the route in which Rama and others killed the enemies in the battle field. ★

448. The subsequent story is the basis for the argument that Rama is still suspecting Sita. ★

wives also to our country!"

"Surely", said Rama and called out to Sugriva.

"Sita would like to see all your wives. All of you get down and get those women", Rama stopped the airplane.

All the important Vanaras got down.

Sugriva hurriedly ran into the harem. "All of you start quickly. We are going to Ayodhya.... You can board the airplane.... quickly.... You should not delay.... Wear more jewels and the like.... There will be very great people in Ayodhya. You should behave well, you know! Come on! Get up! Quick...." He hurried them on. After his wives put on new ornaments along with the old ones, he brought all of them to the plane and they boarded it.

All the Vanara women felt strange on seeing Sita and the airplane. So far, they were not aware of devoted wives and airplanes. Both appeared odd and both appeared identical to them.

"She is Sita Devi! She is a great devoted wife, they say....." they were telling each other.

The plane started off again from Kishkindha.

Sugriva gave courage to all the women. "Don't fear! Don't worry... Hold tightly... Have you noticed how it is flying like a bird?... What do you think about it?... You have to come out of the houses and see every thing.... What do you know about a plane? Do you think it will fall down?.... No!.... Will anything remain if this falls down from here?....." Sugriva suddenly leaned towards Vibhishana. "Do you say this will not fall at all?.... I am asking just like that... to be on the safe side. So, it will not fall! Yeah!.... Whoever made this... he must be a skilled worker. Very good skilled fellow....." Sugriva roamed about with excitement from side to side, telling things about the airplane to all women.

Rama was still depicting all the important aspects of various places on the earth to Sita.

He showed Lake Pampa. He showed Sabari's hermitage. Showed the place where he had killed Kabandha. Showed Panchavati... Showed the hermitages of Agastya.... Sutishna.... Sarabhaka.... Place where he had killed Viradha.... Hermitages of sage Atri.... Chitrakuta mountain.... Guha's kingdom and every thing.

Ayodhya appeared in the distance.

All the Vanaras *fell one above the other* to see all the mansions in Ayodhya from the plane.

The plane landed in the hermitage of Bharadwaja.[449]

Rama saluted sage Bharadwaja and asked, "*Swami!* (Sir!) Are all doing well in Ayodhya? Are all my mothers alive?"

Bharadwaja invited Rama with affection. "All are doing well, my child! Your mothers are happy. You have returned safely. Fourteen years ago, when you lost the kingdom, gave up all pleasures and when you were eating roots and living in the forest, I felt extremely sad. Now the period of your hardships has passed. You have conquered the enemies. You got friends. You are ready for the coronation. I am very happy, my child!

I heard about all your sufferings in the forest. Leaving from Chitrakuta and reaching

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449. Have you noticed the route along which the plane flew? The place also came in the same route along which Rama had gone to Lanka. Do devotees of Rama say, "Rama brought the plane on that route to show all those places to Sita." If it is so, they could have come on that route up to Panchavati and could have directly gone to Kosala, couldn't they? Sita already knew the entire route from Ayodhya to Panchavati, didn't she? Just as people on the ground walk along a short route, that has twists and turns, does an airplane in the sky also go with twists and turns? Although the poet was not aware of how an airplane goes, he failed to imagine it (*even by observing birds!*)

Why did Rama, who was anxious to see Bharata quickly and who did not stop at Agastya, Atri or any other sage, stop at sage Bharadwaja? He could have gone directly to Bharata? See later!

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Panchavati, the abduction of Sita by Ravana (*Alas! Will he enumerate all those things now?*), your grieving over Sita's abduction and making friends with Sugriva, killing Vali, killing Ravana in the battle — I have heard everything. Finally, you have returned happily." Bharadwaja felt happy.[450]

Rama saluted Bharadwaja with humility and asked curiously, "How is Bharata, sir? Is he ruling the people carefully?"

"*My child*! Bharata has abandoned all comforts and is *waiting for your arrival with a thousand eyes*."

"Sir, one who has abandoned all comforts — will he not abandon politics? But the neighbouring enemy kings try to swallow the neighbouring kingdoms, however vast they may be….."

"There is no such threat, Rama! Bharata should hand over your kingdom to you, shouldn't he? Bharata is careful in that matter. He is discharging well the responsibility of ruling under the command of your sandals….. But, he has abandoned his comforts and luxuries and the burden of your separation is depressing him, my child!"

Rama nodded his head and remained silent.

Let anybody tell him in any number of ways about Bharata, Rama was not convinced. — By the time I was at Chitrakuta, Bharata was still an inexperienced person and hence he was ready to give up the kingdom, which he got…. will he do so even today? A man who has tasted kingship for so many years, will he give up the position so easily? What did he enjoy all these years in the attire of a sage? Only now, he has to enjoy all the luxuries. Will the minds of human beings agree to giving up riches, wealth, position and power? Even brothers hate each other for the sake of property, don't they? Do I not see Sugriva and Vibhishana? Did they not betray their own siblings? What is the guarantee that Bharata will not do such a thing? Can't he attempt secretly to kill me as he does not want me to come back to the kingdom? — I must find out what the attitude of Bharata is! If Bharata makes vile attempts, I must mercilessly teach him a lesson! It is very nice that I have brought these Vanara and Rakshasa warriors! I should send some body to Bharata.

Rama looked at Hanuman *serene*ly.

Having understood Rama's looks, Hanuman stood up with folded hands as if asking him to command him.

"Hanuman! You have to go to the capital city."

"Yes, sir! I will *go and come back in four strides*."

"First go to Sringaberipura. Guha has lot of reverence for me. Tell him that I have returned safely. He will feel very happy that my hardships are over. Ask him everything about Bharata. He will definitely tell you the details. Then go to Bharata. Tell him in detail — *like arranging beads in an order* — all things that have happened since I left Chitrakuta. My hardships while living in Panchavati…. abduction of Sita by that wicked fellow…. making friends with Sugriva out of my grief….the killing of Vali and crowning

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450. Yuddha kanda, sarga 127, slokas 16 & 19:

Bharadwaja tells Rama that he grasped everything about Rama's forest life by his power of penance. It seems his long sight (engine) is functioning well. While Bharadwaja was feeling happy over Rama's arrival, Rama asks for a boon.

"O Venerable! While I go to Ayodhya, all trees on my route must bear fruits even out of season and yield honey. I request you that whatever tree we look at must be full of many extremely sweet fruit."

Bharadwaja okayed it and gave him the boon. All the trees blossomed flowers and fruits. The only thing that awaited was eating them!

It seems that Rama, without giving the Vanaras food, will ask them to run around the trees thus, "Go around trees and eat whatever you find."

★

Sugriva.... You have to tell each and every thing, without leaving out a single detail. While telling all these things, examine Bharata's facial expressions. You have to gauge whether he reacts with sorrow for my sorrow and reacts with joy for my joy! You have to shrewdly find out whether or not he welcomes my arrival....."

Hanuman was wondering, 'What is this? Does Ramayya suspect his brother — such a noble man? He listened in surprise *with his mouth open*.

Sugriva moved towards Vibhishana — to whisper!

Sita, who was telling the Vanara women about incidents in Asoka vana, heard her husband's words and stopped in surprise.

Rama was not in a position to understand anybody's looks. He was teaching Hanuman with a *serene* voice. "While we talk to others, we have to understand well their inner feelings! Bharata may speak well outwardly. But his inner feelings will be revealed through his facial expressions and looks. Tell him that I have come along with armies and forces. Tell him that I have also friends who can lay down their lives for me! He may be under the illusion that he can defy me, thinking that I am alone! If he hears that I have come along with an army, he will give up his attempts to....."

Hanuman obviously turned into pale. He *opened his mouth wide like a frog*.

Sugriva clung to the ear of Vibhishana. "Are you listening, are you listening? He always looks at us angrily and sidelong as if we have done wrong to our brother, doesn't he? Now, see, how he is threatening his brother!.... There are enough of loopholes among these brothers. What do you say?"

"Well said! Not only us, all brothers fight with each other", wiping his ear with *dhoti*, Vibhishana turned his looks towards Rama.

By then Rama had realised that all were looking at him and hence controlled his anxiety and became *serene*.

"Hanuman! Have you understood why I said this? I have told you how human beings behave with respect to riches and wealth. Since he has ruled all these years, Bharata may have the desire to stay as the king forever. It is not wrong. If he has such a desire he can keep the kingdom. Will I say 'no'? I will not say 'no' and occupy the kingdom with my valour, you see! If wanted to do so, I would have done it without leaving for exile in the forest, wouldn't I? A noble man like me will never do such thing. As it is good for me to know about Bharata's attitude, I am telling you this. So, inform Bharata about my arrival, find out his inner feelings, gather whether he is willing to give me the kingdom or would like to rule it for himself and let me know this information before I reach there."

All the words of Rama appeared reasonable to Hanuman.

"Ramayya! You know everything — both good and bad! What more do we know than you? I will do as you have asked", Hanuman started off immediately.[451]

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451. Yuddha kanda, sarga 127, slokas 2 to 5:

Rama is asking about Bharata. "Venerable Bharadwaja! Is everybody prosperous in the city? Healthy? Have you heard? Is Bharata virtuous?" To this Bharadwaja's reply: "Wearing matted locks on his head covered with dust, Bharata is waiting for you."

Earlier also, Rudra said to Rama, "Console Bharata who is pathetic" (*aswaanya bharatam diinam*). When he came to Rama in the airplane, Dasaratha said, "You go and see Bharata who is practising affection, strength and Dharma."

Rama also said to Vibhishana when they were in Lanka, "My virtuous brother Bharata is perishing with grief for me. I have to go quickly."

But, Rama suspects Bharata.

Rama is suspicious even though all the elders have spoken good words about Bharata! See what he says to Hanuman (**Yuddha kanda, sarga 128, slokas 1 to 20**): "Hanuman! Go ➔

➔ to Sringaberapura.... inform Guha that I am fine... Guha will happily tell you the route to go to Ayodhya and also about Bharata's nature. (*'pravruttiha' is the word, which the poet used. That is, how is the nature of Bharata!*)

Tell Bharata that I have finished carrying out the command of my father and have returned. Inform me what expression that Bharata wears on his face on hearing about me. (*This means, observe how he reacts when he hears about my arrival!*)

Truly ascertain all the reactions of Bharata and his gestures through the colour of his face, glances and speech. (*This means, 'observe him keenly and let me know his attitude!'*) "Tell him that, having conquered the enemies and won glory, Rama is coming back with friends endowed with extraordinary might."

Thus Rama suspects Bharata and sends a warning with threats.

As it does not look nice if he suspects Bharata so obviously, Rama is giving a reason for his suspicion. "Whose mind will a kingdom — which is exceedingly rich in all coveted enjoyments, teeming with elephants, horses and chariots and which is inherited from one's father and grand father — not actually be attracted to it? (*This means, Rama says, "whose mind will not change if he looks at such a kingdom?" But Bharata had given up the kingdom a long time ago, hadn't he?*)

It is Rama's opinion that Bharata will surely yield to royal pleasures and luxuries and desire to retain the kingdom for himself. Rama does not believe that Bharata was leading an ascetic life and had abandoned all the pleasures!"

Then why did he say to Vibhishana thus, "My virtuous brother is perishing with grief for me." This is merely outward show!

With an intention that nobody should misunderstand him, see what Rama says. "If through this long association, Bharata himself wishes to rule the kingdom, he can rule the entire globe." This means, if Bharata would like to retain the kingdom for himself, Rama says that he has no objection and he would not come in Bharata's way. If he had no objection for Bharata retaining the kingdom, why should he threaten him that he was coming with friends who are endowed with great might? Why should he ask Hanuman to find out Bharata's attitude towards him with knack?

Rama should not suspect Bharata. If he had a doubt it should be with good intention. He should say to Bharata as follows: "Bharata! Fourteen years ago you told me you would give back the kingdom to me. Do you still have the same opinion or has it changed? Long back, when you were inexperienced and young, you said, knowingly or unknowingly, you would give me the kingdom. I do not insist that you give it now. I do not ask that it must happen as per your promise. If you want to retain the kingdom, keep it with you. I am not sad about it."

If Rama wanted to send Hanuman, what Rama ought to say was: "Hanuman! Bharata might be ready to give me the kingdom irrespective of whether or not he is willing. I will not take the kingdom if he gives it to me unwillingly. I will not ask him for the kingdom since he said long back that he would give it. But if you ask him whether or not he is willing to give the kingdom, he may say 'yes' even though he is not willing. But, we can notice sorrow on the face of a person who gives things unwillingly. You observe that! If he feels sad, I will not take the kingdom even if he is ready to give it. That is why, I am asking you to observe his feelings."

If this was Rama's opinion, why does he try to threaten Bharata thus, "Tell him I have come with armies! Tell him I have friends who will give up their lives for me."

Rama is very worried whether Bharata will give him back the kingdom or not. He says any sort of person will yield to the pleasures of the kingdom! As he yields to such pleasures, ➔

Guha had grown very old. He received Hanuman with a lot of love and affection and heard news about Rama. "Alas! Did it happen so?....Did such a thing happen! Tsk…Tsk…Did he face such a hardship?....Tsk….Tsk….Did he suffer so much?...." said he, making a *big noise of sympathy with his mouth.*

After narrating all the hardships of Rama, Hanuman asked, "*Grand father!* What is the news about Bharata?"

"Well, my child! Neither that man is happy nor this man is happy. Though he is ruling the kingdom for name sake, his entire concentration is on his brother. He is eagerly *waiting with a thousand eyes* when he will hand over the kingdom to his brother…. Instead of coming soon and seeing his brother, has Ramayya stopped there and sent you?" Guha said irritably.[452]

Hanuman talked to Guha on some stray topics for a while and slowly touched upon the actual point. "Is Bharata really willing to give back the kingdom to his elder brother? Or, is he intending to steal it?"

Guha got indescribably angry at Hanuman. Though he was about to take out his cigar from his navel, he put it back again and frowned. "You look like a stooge of that gentleman! Enough is enough. Go away." Guha rose up.

"Nay grand father! Do you think Ramayya has come to quarrel? He will take the kingdom only if Bharata gives it to him willingly…. Otherwise, he will not….Throw that cigar piece here! I will see how the cigars in your country are", saying so Hanuman walked behind Guha.

Guha's anger abated a little and he threw a cigar without saying anything.

Hanuman smoked the cigar for a while, opened his eyes wide in ecstasy and appreciated it.

"It is very good, grand father!"

Both of them became friends. Guha became very soft. Both of them talked for a while as to which leaves make tasty cigars.

"*Karakaaku* cigars are the best of all. They are very pungent", said Hanuman.

Guha agreed with it as 'true'.

"Grand father! Have you ever smoked cigars of *Vavila* leaves? Their taste is entirely different. Though they are somewhat savour….." Guha agreed even with that, "Yeah! I smoked." Out of this friendship, Guha showed

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➔ he suspects that everybody yields to it. He has no confidence in Bharata even though many people have told him positively. He stopped at Bharadwaja's hermitage, only in order to find out Bharata's attitude to him.

It did not strike the poet that Rama would be defamed if he suspects Bharata despite positive comments of many elderly people about Bharata. It was the poet's self-confidence, "Who will find fault with Sri Rama?"

After saying all what he wanted to say, Rama said, "You ought to return quickly before we have gone far." (*This means, before we go a little far from here, you have to return to us and tell us the news!"*)

"When Rama commanded so, Hanuman, the son of the wind god, assumed human form and began to travel toward Ayodhya."

Hanuman changed from the form of a Vanara into human form, hasn't he? Now see, how beautifully he flies! "After that Hanuman flew upwards swiftly as if Garuda bird had swiftly gone to catch a serpent." Does a human being walk or fly? Hanuman flew over the river Ganga, crossed it and reached Sringaberipura! ★

[452] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 128, slokas 22 & 23:** Hanuman said to Guha, "Guha! Rama has asked me to enquire about your well-being. You will see Sri Rama at this very place today when sage Bharadwaja permits him after spending the night of the fifth lunar day." (*No attempt of enquiring about Bharata!*) Again, Hanuman flew up. ★

his house and the premises to Hanuman.

Guha has been nurturing gadflies and carpenter bees for the past ten years.

"I have seen people nurturing birds but what is this?", Hanuman wondered.

"These are most useful of all, my child! If anybody talks boringly without leaving us, it is enough if we throw one gadfly on to them.... wait, I will show you!" Guha tried to open a basket of wires.

"I will go grandfather! I have to see Bharata, I have a lot of work..." saying so, Hanuman disappeared.

★ ★

Walking through villages and wondering at the people's garments, appearance and speech, Hanuman reached *Nandigrama*.

Bharata was leading the life of a hermit in the attire of an ascetic. The ministers, priests, commanders, employees — every one in the royal court wore yellow garments. Everybody had detached attitude to life (*Vairaagyam*). Everybody was burdened with the agony of the separation from Rama.[453]

But all of them were unitedly carrying on the ruling of the kingdom effectively, lawfully, skilfully, intelligently, knackly and shrewdly!

As soon as he saw Bharata, Hanuman was convinced that Bharata had real reverence for his brother. Yet Rama's words were resounding in his ears. "Examine his face carefully. Find out all his inner feelings... All the facial expressions ... carefully... skilfully....." everything came to his memory and he stood with folded hands, examining Bharata. "Your Excellency! My name is Hanuman. I am the servant of Sri Ramachandra. Lord! Sri Ramachandra has completed his exile and is returning home." Hanuman said obediently.[454]

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[453] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 128, slokas 32 & 33:** "Hanuman saw Bharata who was served by the ministers, priests and commanders who wore yellow clothes."

If necessary, Bharata can have the attire of a sage, why do all people in the royal court have it? If Rama is not comfortable, should none else have comforts. Should none else be happy.

Perhaps, Bharata is worried that if ministers and others around him wear ornaments etc, his mind will also drag him to ornaments. That is why, he must have ordered everybody to wear yellow clothes.

To make Bharata faultless, see what the poet is saying. "The ministers and the citizens were not inclined to wear and enjoy appropriate garments and ornaments ignoring virtuous Bharata who wore the bark of trees and the skin of black antelope." What detachment! To please the king! But none has detachment from the ruling of the kingdom! ★

[454] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 128, slokas 42 to 44:**

As soon as Hanuman came to Bharata and said that Rama was coming, Bharata said he would give some gifts to Hanuman. Later, he asked about Rama in detail.

See what the gifts are, which Bharata wanted to give. Bharata's words: "O gentle one! Are you a god who has come out of compassion or a human being? In return for the pleasant news, I will give you a hundred thousand cows, a hundred excellent villages and sixteen golden complexion virgin girls (as wives) of good conduct, adorned with earrings decked with all kinds of jewels and who possess a shapely nose and things, moon-like faces and rich in lineage and birth."

Sixteen wives for Hanuman! This is according to Valmiki's *Ramayana*!

Are these wives human women or Vanara women? Do Vanara women stay with Bharata? Human wives for Hanuman? So, there will be innumerable slave women in the hands of the king to give away to any one!

What will our elders — who project Hanuman as a bachelor say now? ★

Bharata fainted out of extreme joy and after regaining consciousness, he asked with excitement, "Are your words true?"

"True, my lord! Sri Rama has stopped at the hermitage of sage Bharadwaja. He must have started from there and is on his way. He asked me to come first and inform you this good news", saying so, Hanuman looked at Bharata from top to toe, with his eyes wide open.

"Ah! I have heard such delightful news now after a long time! As a saying goes, people will be seen even after a hundred years if at all they are alive! That is true.... Hanuman, tell me everything in detail! Tell me how my brother's forest life ended", Bharata looked at him with tears.

Hanuman began to narrate everything that had happened.[455]

Shedding tears profusely, fainting at every moment and regaining consciousness, Bharata heard everything.

Hanuman confirmed Bharata's grief as genuine grief.

"By now Sri Rama will have started from Bharadwaja's hermitage....." Hanuman concluded.

Looking at Satrughna at once, Bharata said, "Get all arrangements made to welcome Sri Rama! Get all the paths leading to Nandigrama repaired! All citizens must worship in temples. Decorate all the streets beautifully.

Prostitutes, bards well versed in eulogy, citizens — let every one go with auspicious musical instruments towards Rama to receive him. There should be no delay of even one moment. Get all arrangements made immediately! This is the order of the 'feet' of Sri Rama", Bharata commanded.[456]

By the time king's command is over, all the arrangements are also over.

All the people in Nandigrama gathered in crowds in the streets. People of Ayodhya too started off for Nandigrama.

Bharata took priests, scholars, ministers and businessmen along with him, put his brother's sandals on his head and started off in a chariot.

Servants fanned the sandals on Bharata's head with white whisks. The King's employees and businessmen saluted the sandals.

Though all people went much beyond the outskirts of the village, there was no sign of Rama's arrival.

Looking at Hanuman angrily, Bharata said, "Is it true what you said? You jungle men do not know any thing. If you open your mouth, you speak a hundred thousand lies", Bharata frowned and said irritably.[457]

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[455] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 129, sloka 5:** If he wanted to tell Bharata about Rama, Hanuman could start from the time when Bharata returned from Chitrakuta, couldn't he? 'Owing to the boons of your mother, Sri Rama started from Ayodhya for the forest", thus Hanuman started from Kaika's boons to see whether Bharata remembered the incident properly or not. This is to say, "Rama suffered so much due to your mother!" It is an attempt to set right Bharata's mind if it vacillates in respect of giving the kingdom! ★

[456] **Yuddha kanda, sarga 130, slokas 6 & 10:** "Level all the ditches and the low lying areas as also the elevated grounds from Nandigrama to outside."

Even today, they repair roads here and there before ministers come on a given route. So, this is a farce that has been going on since Sri Rama's days!

"Royal women, ministers, army, ordinary women, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, people of various castes should go in groups to receive Rama."

People should go at their own interest to receive Rama. Will it amount to respect if people are dragged by commands like, "All of you come here!" There is no difference between this and dragging people in lorries from various villages to attend the meetings of the ministers. This fraudulent practice has been there since the past. ★

Hanuman felt slighted. "All my words are true, my Lord! The Vanaras must be on their way, seeing strange things, playing and eating fruits.... Look over there. I think the Vanaras are coming, destroying the entire Sala forest", saying so, Hanuman raised his neck, extended it and looked at in the distance. Everybody extended their bodies, raised their necks at a distance. The airplane appeared as a dot at a long distance and it came closer in increased size.

By then, all the Vanaras who had started flying arrived.

The plane stopped in the sky.

Bharata and the others who had surrounded him saluted Rama who was in the airplane in the sky.

The airplane landed on the ground.[458]

Bharata went into that airplane along with his men.

Rama's eyes were searching for Hanuman. Observing Bharata keenly with a sidelong glance, he said, "Have you come, my lad!" and suddenly pulled him into his lap and hugged him tightly. "It is so long since I saw you my lad! Are you doing well? Are you all right?" Touching the entire body of Bharata, Rama *suffocated* him.

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457. Yuddha kanda, sarga 130, sloka 22:

"Bharata waited for a while and said to Hanuman, the son of Vayu, the wind god. 'Owing to fickle mindedness that is natural to Vanaras, did you say that Rama was coming? Venerable Rama is not yet seen, why? Why even the Vanaras are not in sight?"

Ridiculing the Vanaras every moment!

It is the intention of the poet to portray that Bharata was eagerly waiting for Rama's arrival.

"Alas! Why has Rama not come so far? When can I see that handsome face?...." Thus the poet could write a hundred slokas, until Rama arrived!

Hanuman had narrated to Bharata everything beginning from Ravana abducting Sita till the end, hadn't he? Did Bharata not understand how much help Hanuman had given Rama? Addressing a person who had given so much help, as 'your monkey mentality'! Among these brothers none of them has a human mentality.

Without ridiculing Hanuman, couldn't the poet find a way to express Bharata's love? Should or should not Bharata show gratitude to Hanuman who had helped his brother?

While bringing his brother's sandals, from Chitrakuta, Bharata said, "Exactly by the time fourteen years are over, I will jump into the fire and die if you do not turn up!

There is a scope for melodrama wherein Bharata waits for the arrival of Rama, Bharata commands to arrange a pyre out of disappointment since Rama has not turned up, Bharata's readiness to jump into the pyre, meanwhile Rama's arrival — the poet did not mould the story like this. Whether this did not strike the poet, or he had forgotten Bharata's vow, he deprived Rama's devotees of this great scene! ★

458. Yuddha kanda, sarga 130, sloka 32:

"In this airplane Rama and Lakshmana, the warriors, Sita Devi, Sugriva, who has great lustre and Vibhishana, who is a Rakshasa were sitting." These were Hanuman's words.

Up to Bharadwaja's hermitage, all people had come in the airplane, hadn't they? So, they dropped the Vanaras there! The Vanaras came flying and raising the dust. Is there any problem if all people board the plane? No, the poet had already depicted it at the time of the departure of the plane in Lanka — that let any number of people board the plane, there still remains space.

Why should the poet ask the Vanaras to get down — unless it is his mean mentality? ★

Hanuman gave courage to Sri Rama with his looks.[459]

Coming out of the embraces of affection of his brother, Bharata saluted Lakshmana and Sita.

Later, he hugged Sugriva also. "You are also our brother!", he expressed his happiness. He talked pleasingly with Vibhishana also. "Because of your help, my brother could accomplish such a great task!" He expressed his gratitude and pleased everybody.

Satrughna also saluted every body.[460]

Not paying much attention to Satrughna, Rama saluted all the mothers.

Bharata took out the sandals from a golden plate and put them on Rama's feet. "Your Excellency! So far I have been guarding your kingdom. I have increased ten times the treasury, granary, army and every thing and I have not spoiled it. Now, I am handing over your kingdom to you." He bowed.

Rama looked with unbelievable amazement. Is Bharata such a noble man? Has he given up his kingdom so easily the state power which he got.... Is it possible for human beings?

Sugriva and Vibhishana too stood looking at Bharata with wonder.

Rama embraced Bharata again and pulled him towards his thigh.[461]

The plane rose up in the sky and reached Nandigrama.

Rama got down from the plane along with the others and ordered the plane, "Pushpaka!

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459. We do not find the incident of Hanuman meeting Rama and telling him about Bharata. The poet, either forgot what he had written earlier or left it aside carelessly! ★

460. Yuddha kanda, sarga 130, slokas 40 & 48: Notice Rama's attitude towards Bharata and Satrughna! "Lifting Bharata (from his feet) whom he had seen after a long time, sitting him on his thigh, Rama felt happy and embraced him."

"Satrughna (first) saluted Rama and Lakshmana and then saluted the feet of Sita Devi with humility."

There is no mention of Rama talking to Satrughna or embracing him.

It did not strike the poet that Rama ought to talk to Satrughna.

All the property related dealings are with Bharata only, aren't they? So, why should he sit Satrughna — who has no value — on his thigh? It will be just carrying weight! ★

461. Yuddha kanda, sarga 130, slokas 53 to 58:

Bharata, who knew the essence of Dharma, brought the sandals which he had carried from Chitrakuta, and kept them near the feet of Rama and said to Rama with folded hands, "O king! I am presenting to you now the kingdom, which I have protected so far. The purpose of my birth has been accomplished as I see you again as the king of Ayodhya."

See what else Bharata says. "King! Look at the treasury, granary, city and the army. I have increased every thing ten fold due to your lustre (moral strength). (*dasa gunam* = ten times; *kritam* = has been done).

Every body in the royal court had detachment! Yet, they governed so enthusiastically. How did the wealth increase ten fold in fourteen years? What did they do to increase it?

Sugriva and Vibhishana shed tears on seeing Bharata speaking so reverently to his brother. (*Perhaps, they felt ashamed that they were not such good brothers!*)

"Later, Sri Rama sat Bharata on his thigh happily and went to Nandigrama in the airplane. (*Again on the thigh! Bharata alone had the fortune of sitting on Rama's thighs. Lakshmana did not have that fortune. Satrughna too did not have it. Of course Bharata too will not have it hereafter. He has already given away the kingdom, hasn't he?*) ★

Now you go to Kubera." That plane flew towards north.

While the plane was leaving, Vibhishana was shocked and looked at Sugriva with a reddened face. Except looks, there was no scope to talk even a word. People surrounded them and looking at them from top to toe.[462]

Bharata was telling something to Rama. He was saluting every now and then. "Your Excellency! I cannot carry on the burden of ruling this kingdom! You have to accept this great responsibility. Can a calf do whatever an ox does? Can a donkey run like a horse? Can a swan fly like a crow? I am unfit to carry on politics like you, who is a politician. Just as a fruitless tree in the backyard is useless, we do not have any use for the kingdom, which you do not rule. We have to see your coronation which will give us the utmost satisfaction of our eyes.

You have to wake up daily with the auspicious musical instruments. A great man like you must enjoy all pleasures. You have to be the king as long as the earth exists. Kindly accept my request!" Bharata prayed with folded hands.

Rama — who was surprised when Bharata said he would give up the kingdom for his sake — did not feel strange now.

When a valorous man, politician and man who terrifies his enemies like me is here, will Bharata be enough to rule the kingdom? Bharata is himself acknowledging that he is incapable and ineligible. What will an incapable man do but hand over the kingdom to a capable man? My own greatness will fetch me the kingdom. It is inevitable, isn't it? While seas of joy are surging forward in his heart, Rama nodded his head with a smile and gave his consent to accept the kingdom.[463]

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462. Yuddha kanda, sarga 130, slokas 59 & 60:

"Then Rama reached Nandigrama, got down from the plane and stood on the ground. Seeing that great plane, Rama said, 'Now go back to Kubera. I have given you the order!' As Rama ordered that Pushpaka plane went toward Kubera's mansion in the north."

That plane originally belonged to Kubera. Then Ravana conquered it. Later it belonged to Vibhishana. Vibhishana had given it to Rama — either for travelling or forever. Let us suppose, he had given it away forever. When Rama does not have the intention of keeping it with him, Rama should have given it back to Vibhishana, shouldn't he? Why should he send it to Kubera?

Sugriva, Vibhishana and others had to go back to their countries, didn't they? Should they fly back?

When the entire Lanka belonged to Vibhishana, will the plane — which Ravana conquered — not belong to Vibhishana?

Kubera belongs to the race of gods. Vibhishana belongs to the Rakshasa race. This discriminatory attitude has always been there in Rama's mind. Though he simply makes empty talk that Vibhishana is virtuous and noble, Rama does not like to do any thing that benefits Vibhishana. Therefore, he sent away the plane to Kubera. ★

463. Yuddha kanda, sarga 131, sloka 12: The poet too hesitates and feels it will be inappropriate if Rama just takes away the kingdom from Bharata. That's why, he is preparing a great reason, "Rama accepts because Bharata is incapable. Otherwise why will he accept it?"

Bharata is describing himself as an inefficient person. "King! Just as a calf cannot carry the same weight, which a fat bull carries, I am not eligible to carry the weight of this kingdom. Just as a donkey cannot run like a horse and a crow cannot fly like a swan, I am not capable of carrying the weight of this kingdom….." Thus Bharata said many words.

Rama, who had conquered the cities of the enemies, heard Bharata's words and said 'yes'. (*He said, 'Yes, you are incapable and I am capable'*) and sat on the auspicious throne. (*At* ➔

"See how great Bharata is? He stood by his word both then and now!", many people in the audience praised him before others who stood beside them.

"All these years, he has been in the attire of an ascetic and observed some principles. May be he did not understand the value of the kingdom! Otherwise, would he give it up? I do not believe it"

"Even ascetics want kingdoms, don't they? Haven't we heard this in stories? While sages perform penances, Indra feels worried that they might wish for his position and hence disturbs those penances by sending celestial nymphs (*Apsarasas*), doesn't he? Why doesn't Bharata know the value of the kingdom? This is his goodness."

People were arguing, "Is Bharata good or Rama?"

One gentleman was greatly annoyed at Bharata's action. "Some people make great sacrifices for the sake of false prestige, however much they lose! Look at my co-son-in-law (my wife's sister's husband)! He even removes his own clothes from his body and donates them. Whereas my sister-in-law (my wife's sister) goes around others' houses with a *cheta* ('winnowing basket') to borrow things. Moreover, he feels proud, "who has more fame than me in this village?"

"How much did your sister-in-law borrow from your house?"

"They can't play such tricks with me. I will not allow any loan to those who run after false prestige like my co-son-in-law.... I told you about it because Bharata's craziness is similar to the craziness of my co-son-in-law."

"If it is craziness, how can it be so much? As much as to give up the kingdom?"

"What will an incapable man do but give it up? Maybe he thought, 'Why should I have this headache instead of eating and roaming about comfortably?"

"Why incapability? How could he increase the treasury for ten times, unless he had the knack?"

"But he himself said so — that he is incapable."

"He just said that to please his brother. How can a man— who has ruled for fourteen years — be incapable?"

"Are all of you going to Ayodhya? The coronation will be held there!"

"Let's go and see. What will we do, sitting at home?"

People are going towards Ayodhya in crowds.

After Rama agreed to receive the reins of the kingdom, barbers came and shaved all of them.

All the 'sages' — Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, Satrughna — became princes after an auspicious bath.

They combed Rama's hair, put ornaments all over the body, dressed him in silk garments and decorated him with all adornments which

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➔ *last he 'climbed' the throne!*) If Rama has to become a horse, all others have to become donkeys!

If Rama has to become a swan, all others have to become crows!

Is it necessary to make Bharata seem useless in order to hand over the kingdom to Rama? How did such an incapable (Bharata) increase the wealth of the kingdom ten folds? — Perhaps Rama would have increased a thousand times! From this point of view, 'Yes, Bharata is incapable!'

Why all these troubles? Why should Bharata make himself a donkey and a dog? Mr. Poet! Is it not enough if Bharata gave up the kingdom saying, "Brother! I have ruled the kingdom so far as per my promise. Now you take it. I will assist you."

Do you say, "It is enough but how to glorify Rama compared to Bharata?"

Even now, has Rama become greater than Bharata? Only your mentality of a slave of Rama is evident once again!

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he had not had during the past fourteen years"

All the women adorned Sita.

Chariots were made ready to go to Ayodhya.

Rama got into a very beautifully decorated chariot.

While Satrughna held the umbrella, Lakshmana and Vibhishana were fanning him with *Vinjaamara* (white whisks) and Bharata was riding the chariots, Rama started off to Ayodhya.

Sugriva sat on an elephant.[464]

The procession started with female dancers and musical instruments.

People rushed to see Rama along the route. They felt strange.

"How handsome he is!"

"If those who sit comfortably in the shade do not look handsome, will you and I look handsome?"

"He has suffered many hardships. How could he sit in the shade?"

"See how fat he is. You say he has suffered a lot!"

"Stop! You talk without fear or respect. Hereafter he is our king. 'A king is equal to god', elders say so. Just as a father takes care of his children, the king rules people. Even secretly also, we should not talk about the king with such disrespect."

"As he appeared very fat, I said he is fat. What is wrong?"

"Enough! Stop quarrelling...You don't bother about what is good and what is bad.... They say, from today it is the end of the rule by sandals, is it so?"

"So what? What will we gain? All these years Bharata ruled. Now Rama will rule. What do we gain afresh?"

"You are funny! Do you think there is no difference between one individual and another?"

"There may be differences between you and me but what differences do you find between one king and another?"

"There may be a merciful king and a merciless king."

"But both merciful king as well as merciless king collect taxes. Whoever be the king, he will rule as per their calculation. Have you noticed how much wealth that Bharata has increased during the past fourteen years! Rama will also increase it in the same manner."

If not kings, do we increase wealth? They must have done pious acts in some previous birth. That's why they became kings and we became paupers."

"Enough. Stop disturbing.... It seems the procession has stopped. See, how well the women dance!"

All the people gathered around the prostitutes who were dancing.

The procession with interruptions reached Ayodhya.

All the arrangements for Rama's coronation were ready.

The coronation took place so grandly that none had ever seen or heard of such a celebration before.

Sri Rama Chandra sat on the gem-studded throne! Throne! After a long time! Since the day when the coronation had been stopped! Hereafter I am the king! Emperor!

Until then, sandals used to be on this throne! Now in their place, Rama! Both sandals and Rama became identical! Sandals are Rama! Rama is sandals!

Wishing victory to the lord of Kosala Sri

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464. Yuddha kanda, sarga 131, slokas 29 & 31: ".....(to Rama who sat in the chariot) Vibhishana, the Rakshasa king was fanning him with a white whisk."

"Sugriva, best among Vanaras, climbed on a hill-like elephant called Satrunjayam."

Rama has been describing Sugriva as his brother. Bharata also said to Sugriva, "You are one of our brothers." They have established this kind of relationship of brothers with Sugriva. So, only Sugriva must be in the chariot along with Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Satrughna. Vibhishana must be separately elsewhere. Does the poet not know this point? ★

Rama Chandra Murthi, the victory slogans of his sycophants touched the sky.

The people around wondered and looked with wide open mouths in surprise.

"Who will be the prince?"

"Who else will it be? It will be only Bharata!"

Speculation began among the people.

"Rama likes Lakshmana very much, doesn't he?"

"So what?.... Poor fellow Bharata has given up such a big kingdom. Will Rama not have him as a prince?"

"Do you bet with me?"

"Yeah, I will bet. How much?"

"Your wife must not quarrel with my wife even if we pluck lemon fruits, *Kariveepaaku*, mangoes or any thing from your backyard."

"All right"

With the sounds, and glitter of his ornaments Sri Ramachandra rose up and declared, "I submit to all those in this assembly that I am appointing Lakshmana as the prince of this Kosala empire." Rama sat down after looking at the assembly with smiles.

In the assembly, amidst such silence, a little tumult began.

There was no trace of even a single drop of blood on the face of the gentleman who had lemon trees and mango trees in his backyard.

His neighbour felt shy about plucking mangoes unjustly and smiled, "All right! We will not pluck them"

"What do you talk? Pluck them as you please. If I object, slap me with your foot wear. I stand by my word!" The gentleman of mango trees *raised his head with pride*.

Lakshmana bowed obediently before the emperor and submitted. "Forgive me Lord! When Bharata — who is elder than I and who has ruled the kingdom for fourteen years — is there, you have made me the prince. From this, I realise how kind you are to me. But I cannot carry this burden of the kingdom. I do not wish for anything other than serving you." He felt shy and lowered his head.

Rama, with *serene* looks, declared Bharata as the prince.[465]

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465. Yuddha kanda, sarga 131, slokas 86 to 88: Appointment of a prince by Rama did not take place during Rama's coronation. Rama's coronation ends grandly. Rama gave gifts to the Vanaras and the Rakshasas. Everybody returned to their respective countries.

Thereafter, Rama rules the kingdom. Then he appoints the prince. "Rama — who has no enemies, who is very generous, rules the entire kingdom with extreme joy." (*Thank god! Ruling the kingdom after so long a time!*)

Virtuous Rama said to virtuous Lakshmana as follows: Virtuous man! You also rule along with me this earth that was ruled by former kings with might. Be a prince and along with me, you too carry on the burden of this kingdom, which our forefathers ruled."

"When Lakshmana did not give his consent even though being repeatedly entreated. Rama then consecrated Bharata as the prince."

Lakshmana did not agree however much Rama asked him. Then Rama appointed Bharata as prince.

This means, Rama does not have the sense and *dharma*, which Lakshmana has. The poet has more confidence in Lakshmana than in Bharata — because there is no threat to Rama from Lakshmana. Again he has some hesitation that it may not look nice if he gives the position of prince to Lakshmana. This is the conflict.

Here the actual question which we ought to think about is: Was Bharata crowned?

What about Rama following the orders of his father? Were boons given to Kaika fulfilled? Think about these questions.

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Thereafter, Lord Sri Rama Chandra generously gave donations to Brahmins.

He gave fitting gifts to important Vanaras like Sugriva and Angada.

Sita took out a necklace of pearls from her neck and paused looking at her husband with hesitation.

Rama understood and gave her permission with a smile.

"Give it to the person whom you like."

Feeling happy, Sita gave that necklace to Hanuman.

The poets who could write about kings and rulers in a few moments composed the entire story of Rama's exile wonderfully into lyrics and sang in the assembly. The female dancers acted in accordance with the lyrics.

On hearing the hardships, which Sri Rama Chandra had faced, people shed tears, recalled again and again, cried, told each other and went to their homes.

Those rock-hearted fellows who did not shed even a single tear began to argue with each other.

"I don't understand one thing. Two years ago they auctioned my field as I did not pay land tax."

"Would they not auction it if you did not pay tax? Would they keep quiet?"

"Will Rama also do the same thing?"

"Yeah. Even Rama will do the same thing. Even god will do the same thing!"

"Then, keep quiet. What is the good in him? Hell with his goodness.... It is their duty.... This is our destiny...."

"Don't dismiss the matter like that. If Rama rules.... rather than Bharata.... all of us will surely be very happy and comfortable!"

"All right! We will see that as well. How he will make us happy!" **466**

[Translation: **B. R. Bapuji**]

Here ends 'Yuddha kanda' Next begins 'Uttara kanda'

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466. Yuddha kanda, sarga 131, from sloka 89 to the end:

After his coronation, Rama ruled the kingdom and performed hundreds of sacrifices. People under 'Rama's rule' were very happy. — This is the poet's description.

After describing the greatness of Rama's rule, at the end it is concluded as follows: "Rama, along with his brothers, ruled the kingdom for eleven thousand years."

After this, there is a description of the gains that people who listen to this first epic — which Valmiki composed — get.

With this note on the 'results of hearing' (*Phala Sruti*), 'Yuddha kanda' ends.

Next, we have 'Uttara Kanda'. This begins with the early days of Rama's rule.

As Phala Sruti is given at the end of 'Yuddha kanda', there is a scope to assume that Valmiki's *Ramayana*, ends with this kanda and the following Uttara kanda is an interpolation.

In this 'Poisonous Tree', we will have another story on 'Rama's Rule' (*Rama Raajyam*)

After we complete all the stories in this 'Poisonous Tree', (after the completion of 'Uttara kanda' also), I will talk about 'Phala Sruti' which the poet gave at the end of 'Yuddha kanda'. ★

Link-11

Between the 15th Story and the 16th Story

[The **15th** story ends with Rama's arrival and coronation at Ayodhya. The **16th** story begins with the beginning of Rama's rule. This is the link between the two stories.][467]

'Uttara kanda' begins

Having learnt that Rama had killed all the Rakshasas, that he had arrived in Ayodhya and had had his coronation, all the sages started off from all directions towards Ayodhya. Some came from the north, some from the east, some from the south and some from the west, stood in front of Rama's mansion and said to the gate keeper, "Tell Sri Rama that all the sages have come."

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[467] **Uttara kanda** begins with this link. For this, I read the Telugu translation of '*Srimadraamaayanee Uttara kandaha*" published by *Vavilla Ramasastrulu and Sons* in **1925**. The translator is not seen in the book. He is 'torn'. I could not get his name through libraries. Since Mr. Chadaluvada Sundara Rama Sastrulu prepared the Telugu translations of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, which 'Vavilla and Sons' published, I presume this translation of *Uttara kanda* is also by him. I have yet to confirm this. Until then I use his name only wherever necessary.

There are **124** sargas on the whole in 'Uttara kanda'. Out of these, **13** sargas are wholly Interpolations according to Mr. Sundara Rama Sastrulu. They are: **5** sargas from **24** to **28**. **5** sargas from **43** to **47** and **3** sargas from **70** to **72**.

Apart from these, he has identified by means of brackets those slokas, which are interpolations in other sargas.

He has translated serially even these **13** sargas, which he has identified as Interpolations. But he has not given them numbers. For example, as sargas from **24** to **28** are Interpolations, he has assigned the number **24** to the **29th** sarga. Thus, as he discounted **13** sargas, there are numbers for **111** sargas only. But, when I had to mention the numbers of sargas in my foot notes, I took those sargas for which Mr. Sundara Rama Sastrulu has not given numbers and gave them serial numbers.

In fact there is an argument that the entire 'Uttara Kanda' is an Interpolation, isn't it?

"Not the entire kanda is an Interpolation. Only **13** sargas are Interpolations." — This is the argument of the translator.

"Interpolations are also part of *Ramayana*. What everybody knows is that *Ramayana* which includes Interpolations." — As this is my view, I have given serial numbers to those sargas as well which Mr. Sundara Rama Sastrulu left out. As per this calculation, I have given sarga numbers while mentioning them in the footnotes. For example, when I cite '**sarga 40**', it must be **sarga 35** in Mr. Sundara Rama Sastrulu's translation. Readers have to notice this difference in the sargas that I have cited.

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As soon as the gate keeper informed Rama, Rama called all the sages inside and honoured them according to their status and (*Distinctions even among sages! Perhaps they decide status differences depending on the differences in the beards!*) enquired about their well being.

All the sages felt happy and said, "We are very well, Rama! You have already killed all the Rakshasas. What more difficulties can we have?

Later all of them began to praise Rama. 'You are very great! That man cannot stand before you, this man cannot stand before you! You did this, you did that!" — This is how their eulogy went on. It went on and on and finally they concluded thus, "Was it easy to kill Indrajit?.... You have killed such a great warrior also! When we heard that Indrajit had died, all of us, with joy,……" saying so they shed *tears of joy* again which they had shed earlier.

Rama (*feeling extreme joy in his heart*) asked the sages obediently with folded hands. "O great sages! When there are many great warriors among Rakshasas, you praise the valour of Indrajit so much. How did Indrajit become greater than his father? How did he conquer Devendra? Tell me every thing", he looked curiously at them. (*Rama has the quality of listening stories but he has no sense of asking questions!*)

Sage Agastya began to narrate. "In *Krita yuga* in the past (*It is the calculation of the sages that Rama is living in 'Treta yuga'*) a Prajapati had a son called Pulastya. He was so noble that we cannot describe. He was a lump of good qualities. Once, he went to sage Trinabindu who was on Meru mountain to learn Dharma, controlled his senses and began penance.

The locations in that Meru mountain are very beautiful and many girls of the sages, Nagas and Apsarasas used to come there to play.

On seeing the play and laughter of those girls, the penance of Pulastya, who was so good that he was *an anthill of good qualities,* was disturbed, got angry and cursed thus, "whoever comes in my sight, will become pregnant." **468**

All the girls who used to play there were afraid and stopped going there. (*Why the hell do they perform penance where girls play?*) The daughter of Trinabindu was not aware of this curse. She went there to play as usual. There were no other girls. She went to Pulastya. He saw this girl. This girl became pregnant. (*This means, that 'lump of good qualities' molested this girl!*) The girl was afraid and went home.

"Who made you like this? Why did this happen?", the father asked.

"I do not know any thing. I went to play. There was none there. Only Pulastya was there. It happened like this", she said.

Trinabindu thought with his divine sight and came to know every thing. He took the girl to Pulastya and said, "Take this girl as alms! She will do service to you, who has conquered the senses!"

Pulastya agreed and married her. They got a son. His name was Visravasu. He too performed penance. (*Where will the qualities of his father go?*)

On learning that Visravasu was a good man, Bharadwaja gave his daughter Devavarni to Visravasu in marriage. They got Kubera.

Kubera too began penance. (*Poor fellow! This must be a disease from the side of the father!*)

Brahma asked Kubera, "Ask whatever boons you want!"

"I want to rule the world and control wealth", said Kubera. (*However great penance one may perform, what he needs is domination over the world!*)

Brahma said, "So far Indra, Yama and Varuna (god of rain) — only these three have been rulers of the world. Any way, I was

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468. This means a situation arose in society that pregnancy without marriage was considered a curse. Whenever they come across a girl, this is the gift that the sages give! ★

thinking of a fourth ruler. All right! You be the ruler. Look! Take this Pushpaka airplane also. This is very great." He narrated its greatness. It is neither very hot nor very cold in it. This is one of its great qualities. Thus, Brahma gave him boons and left.

Kubera went to his father and asked, "Brahma did not tell me where I should live . You tell me! (*He does not know where to live. But he will rule all the worlds! Brahma gave away the boon to rule the world!*)

"My Lad! Viswakarma has built the city of Lanka on Trikuta mountain in the south sea for Rakshasas. Rakshasas have lived there for some time, but left that city out of fear of Vishnu and gone to the nether world. Now, Lanka is vacant. Stay there" (*Rule in that corner!*), said Kubera's father. Kubera occupied Lanka.

On hearing so far, Rama wondered and asked, "Did the Rakshasas also live in Lanka in the past? Who was their ancestor? Why did Vishnu chase them away from Lanka?"

Agastya resumed with a smile. "First Brahma created water. (*Sir! Who did create Brahma first?*) Brahma created some living beings to protect that water. They suffered from lack of food. Some of them were ready to 'eat' water (*bhakshaamaha*). Others said, "*rakshamaha*" (We will protect!)

Those who said 'bhakshaamaha' became Yakshas and those who said 'rakshaamaha' became Rakshasas. (*Those who follow Brahma's instructions became Rakshasas! How strange it is?*)

Thus Rakshasas were first born.[469]

Among them there wee two brothers named Heti and Praheti. Praheti was a virtuous man. He went away to do penance. Heti was not a virtuous man. He married a woman called Bhaya. They got a son called Vidyutkesa. Vidyutkesa's wife was Salakantaka. They got Sukesa. Sukesa's wife was Devavati. They got Malyavan, Sumali and Mali. These three brothers asked Viswakarma to build a good city!

Viswakarma said, "Lanka is ready on Trikuta mountain. Go there!" (*Did he say, "Who will build it again?"*)

These three brothers settled down in Lanka.

Malayavan's wife was Sundari. They got Vajramushti, Virupaksha and some more sons. (*Only sons are born. Have you noticed birth of daughters any where?*)

Sumali's wife was Ketumati. They got Prahasta, Akampana, Dhumraksha and some more sons; and daughters called 'Pushpotkata, Kaikasi and Kumbhinasi. (*Surprising! Here we got daughters also!*)

Mali's wife was Vasudha. They too had a few children.

All these Rakshasas settled in Lanka and began to harass sages and gods. (*What does harassing mean? Perhaps they ridicule and make fun of sages!*)

Gods went to Siva and cried for help. Siva said he could not do any thing. He asked them to go to Vishnu. Gods went to Vishnu as Siva had suggested. Vishnu gave the gods the assurance to kill Rakshasas. Rakshasas came to know about this. Malyavan discussed it with his younger brothers. "We have studied the Vedas. He has given us many donations and charities. We have received boons.... We do

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469. Uttara kanda, sarga 4, slokas 13 & 14:

These Yakshas and Rakshasas became so since they spoke in Sanskrit like this

They became Yakshas since they said, 'bhakshaamaha'.

They became Rakṣhasas since they said, 'rakshaamaha'.

Well, then, what would they have become had they spoken in Telugu?

If they had spoken in Italian or Persian?

Anyway, the reasons for the emergence of Rakshasas are: (1) Following whatever Brahma said. (2) Speaking in Sanskrit.

So those who do these two things will become bad people.

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not catch diseases. Owing to long life we do not have a threat to our lives. let us fight Vishnu", they decided.

Immediately all the Rakshasas sat on fish, snakes and many animals (*except ants*) and proceeded against Vishnu to fight.

They found bad omens all along their way. Without fear, Rakshasas went to heaven. (*Yeah! Let there be any number of difficulties!*)

Vishnu sat on Garuda, took all the weapons and went to the battle alone. (*Confidence on weapons!*)

A fierce battle took place. The battle ground resounded with the lion-like battle cries of Vishnu and cries for help of Rakshasas. Vishnu cut the head of Mali with his wheel. Sumali and Malyavan withdrew their armies and returned. Vishnu began to chase the fleeing Rakshasas and kill them. Malyavan got angry and abused Vishnu, "Don't you have any sense? Don't you know the principle that one should not kill the fleeing people?" He started to fight again. He faced defeat again.

Thus Rakshasas had been fighting with Vishnu and facing defeat repeatedly. Finally, unable to withstand the menace of Vishnu, they left Lanka and fled into the nether world. (*Rakshasas were wicked. Devatas (gods) were good. To protect gods, Vishnu defeated Rakshasas and chased them away. This is the story here!*)

Rama! This is how Vishnu killed Rakshasas then. Now you have annihilated them. Whenever 'adharma' increases you will be born", said sage Agastya.

Later, again, Agastya resumed the story of Rakshasas. "Once when Sumali, the Rakshasa, was roaming about with his daughter Kaikasi, he saw Kubera who was going to his father in an airplane from Lanka. On seeing the luxuries and wealth of Kubera, Sumali felt very sad. "How can we get back our Lanka again?" he thought. He said to his daughter , "You too marry Visravasu and give birth to a son like Kubera."

Kaikasi agreed and went to Visravasu.

That Visravasu, who was a Brahmin, (*the poet used the word 'dwijaha'*) looked at Kaikasi and asked her, "Whose daughter are you? Why have you come?"

Rubbing her big toe on the ground, Kaikasi said shyly, "My name is Kaikasi. My father asked me to go to you. The rest, you grasp!"

He grasped the rest of the matter with his divine sight. "Oh! I see! Do I have to marry you? All right!" he said. "You have come to me at a terrible evening time. You will beget children who will do vile acts", he said. (*A father who does vile things will teach vile acts to his children, won't he?*)

Kaikasi prayed to him that it should not happen so.

"All right! 'Your' last son will be a good one", Visravasu was merciful and gave her the boon. (*The boy who was going to be born was her son alone, not his son!*)

Kaikasi begot four children. The eldest was Ravana.[470] Ten heads, twenty hands, tusks. Very ugly.

The second one was Kumbhakarna. What a long fellow! Indescribably ugly. The third child was Surpanakha. Uglier than her elder brothers. Moreover, she was full of jealousy. The last one was Vibhishana. His handsomeness was not small. His good qualities were not few. He was the incarnation of the god of Dharma. As soon as he was born, a rain of flowers showered. Drums were heard. (A *Rain of lies showered. 'When Vibhishana's siblings were all Rakshasas and such wicked people, how could this fellow alone become such a good boy?' This sort of question arises. That's why this jumbled story that the father gave the mother a boon that her last son would be a good boy).*

Ravana became a wicked man who harassed sages.

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470. Ravana's father was Visravasu. He was a Brahmin. A great sage. Mother, a Rakshasa woman of Rakshasa race. Rakshasas were enemies of Brahmins and sages. Ravana became a Rakshasa like his mother, while the dynasty (family) was that of his father and grand father. Pulastya family.

★

Whereas Vibhishana studied the Vedas (*one will come to know all kinds of tricks only by reading them, isn't it?*) and became a noble man.

Once Kubera came to his father (Visravasu) on an aeroplane.

Pointing towards Kubera, Kaikasi said to her son Ravana, "My child! See how great your elder brother is! You too should become such a great man!"

"All right, mother! I will become a great man", said Ravana to his mother. (*Alas! It would have been better if he had gone to study!*)

Kumbhakarna performed a terrible penance for ten thousand years.

Vibhishana performed a terrible penance for five thousand years standing on a single leg and five thousand years standing on both the legs. (*Perhaps standing on one leg might have hurt him.*)

Ravana performed penance for a thousand years and cut off one of his heads and dropped it in the fire (sacrifice). Again he performed penance for a thousand years and cut off the second head and offered it to fire. (*Alas! How filthy these stories are! We are compelled to read such filth!*) In this manner, after offering nine heads to the fire and when he was about to cut off the tenth head Brahma appeared.

"Give me a boon so that I live for ever without death!", said Ravana.

"Not possible", said Brahma. "It is not possible for any living being to live without death. Ask for any other boon."

"All right! Then, make it possible that I will not face death from gods and Gandharvas", asked Ravana.

"All right! You will get back all your heads. I will also give you power that enables you to change into whatever form you want", saying so, Brahma thus, gave him one more boon.

Then, Brahma went to Vibhishana.

Vibhishana asked with humility, "I wish to always possess a virtuous mentality. (*He knew that his mentality would not be stable if he did not have a boon).* I should know how to use Brahma's arrow without having to learn it." *(Is this virtuous mentality!)*

"All right! You were always a virtuous man! Though born to a Rakshasa mother, you have not developed a Rakshasa mentality", praised Brahma. (*Just as this fellow had not acquired Brahma's mentality though born as Brahma!*)

Later, while Brahma was about to go to Kumbhakarna, all the gods made a hulla baloo. "No, no. Kumbhakarna is already a very wicked man. If you give boons, he will become more wicked", they said.

Brahma thought about it, called Saraswati and said to her, "You go and sit on the tongue of Kumbhakarna. Make him utter as I intend."

Immediately Saraswati went and sat on Kumbhakarna's tongue. Then, Brahma asked Kumbhakarna, "What boons do you want?" Kumbhakarna asked, "I should sleep for thousands of years." (*Saraswati herself made him utter these words. So, Saraswati is also not a reliable woman!*) Brahma said, "All right!" and went away. Saraswati also left from Kumbhakarna's tongue.

Kumbhakarna wondered at his own words. "Why did I ask for this?", he pondered over it. "Gods have deceived me", he realised.

In this manner, Ravana got boons and returned home along with his brothers.

Ravana's grand father narrated all the past things to Ravana and said, "Lanka is ours. Now, Kubera is there. You have to occupy it again."

Ravana was not willing to do that. "Kubera is my elder brother. Is it not wrong to defy the elder brother", he asked.

Prahasta said to Ravana, "In the matters of valour, how does the relation between brothers matter? Diti's children (*Daityas*) and Aditi's children (*Devatas*) were also brothers. Did they not fight for power? Vishnu defeated Daityas and gave away their wealth to the gods, didn't he?"

Prahasta's words were convincing to Ravana. "All right! You go to Kubera. Ask him to give up Lanka to me". Ravana sent Prahasta as his messenger to Kubera.

Prahasta narrated all the background of Lanka to Kubera and said, "Lanka should belong to the Rakshasas. What do you want me to tell Ravana?"

Kubera said, "I came here when Lanka was vacant without Rakshasas. Let Ravana also come and stay here. He will stay with me". Again he went to his father and asked him, "Ravana has sent a message that I should give Lanka. What do you want me to do?"

"Ravana is wicked. He has even got new boons. (*Kubera also had boons. But they had become old! But, Ravana's boons are fresh, aren't they? May be new boons work better!*) Leave Lanka and go to Kailasa mountain. There it is very pleasant. The River Ganga flows beautifully." Visravasu described the new place a lot. (*Glorifying the new one when the old one is not available!*)

Kubera gave up Lanka. Ravana entered Lanka along with all Rakshasas.

Later Ravana got his younger sister Surpanakha married to Vidyujjihva, who belonged to Kalakeya race.

Ravana went for hunting and saw Maya's daughter Mandodari. Maya told all his details to Ravana. "My wife is Hema. She is a nymph (Apsarasa). We lived happily for five hundred years. Now, my wife is not with me. She had gone on god's assignment. Mayavi, Dundubhi are my sons. (*It was this Dundubhi who called Vali for a fight!*)"

Ravana also told his details.

Maya got Mandodari married to Ravana.

Later Ravana got his younger brothers also married.

Kumbhakarna's wife is Vajrajwala.

Vibhishana's wife is Sarama.

Meghanatha (Indrajit) was born to Mandodari.

Kumbhakarna began to sleep. He went to Ravana and asked, "Brother! Get me a house built!" Ravana immediately got a big mansion built for him. Its dimensions are 2 yojanas long X 1 yojana width.

On hearing that Ravana was harassing gods, Kubera sent word to Ravana through a messenger. "Recently I have performed penance in the Himalayas for 8 hundred years. There, Siva was sauntering about along with Parvati. Though I looked at Parvati without any evil intention, my right eye was burnt down. (*It would not have been burnt down had he looked with an evil intention!*) Then, I made friends with Siva and have come back. I heard about your vile acts. Be a good person at least hereafter. Do not bring *scar* to our dynasty" — This was the message.

Ravana became angry, slay the messenger of Kubera, then he took armies along with him and went to battle against Kubera.

A fierce battle took place.

Kubera was defeated.

Ravana confiscated his Pushpaka plane, boarded it and began to roam around all the worlds.

The plane stopped at *Saravana vana*. The plane became motionless as a mountain came in its way.

Nandiswara came to Ravana and said, "Here Siva is sporting. He ordered me not to allow any one here. Go away from here at once."

Ravana got angry and said, "*Siva, or Giva*? Who is that Siva? You monkey-faced fellow?" He laughed and got down from the plane.

Nandi angrily said, "You have ridiculed me as a monkey-faced fellow. Such monkeys will cause your death."

As soon as Nandi uttered these words, a rain of flowers showered. The celestial drums sounded. (*It seems gods sit ready in the sky to beat drums whenever somebody speaks!*)

Ravana began to shake the mountain that had come in the way of his plane. All those who were on the mountain were frightened and gathered round Siva.

Siva pressed the mountain with one of his big toes. Ravana's hands were pressed under the mountain and he began to cry terribly. The entire world became upset. Ravana's ministers said to Ravana, "Pray to Siva. There is no other way."

Ravana kept on praying with praises for a thousand years. By then Siva softened and lifted his toe a little bit. Also he gave many boons to Ravana.

Ravana again started off in the plane. He saw a woman doing penance. "You are so beautiful. Why do you do penance at this age?

Who is your husband? (*Did he cause so much depression that you do this penance?*), Ravana asked her.

She said, "I am the grand daughter of Brihaspati. My father always reads the Vedas. I was born a literary girl. (*Vaangmaya kanya*). Hence I am Vedavati. Many men have tried to marry me. But my father did not agree to give me to any one except Vishnu. (*How much dowry will your father give to Vishnu? Vishnu will take a lot, you know!*) A Rakshasa king named Dambhu killed my father while he was sleeping since my father did not give me to him. My mother entered the fire along with the body of my father. As my father had always wished to give me to Vishnu, I concentrated my mind on Vishnu only. I am doing penance to marry Vishnu. I know every thing about you. You are Ravana. Head of Lanka."

Hearing every thing Ravana said, "It is all right. But Vishnu does not stand in comparison to me. Marry me."

"Don't say that. It's wrong. Vishnu is the head of all the three worlds", said Vedavati.

Ravana held Vedavati's hair out of sexual desire.

Vedavati at once became furious and cut her hair off with the hand. "Wicked fellow! Touching my hair, you have insulted me. I will die before your eyes and will be born again as *Ayonija* (not born of womb) to kill you. I am hesitating to curse you because my penance will go waste," saying so, she jumped into the fire.

Immediately she was born in a lotus.

Ravana brought Vedavati along with the lotus into Lanka. His minister said, "It will be a danger to you if she is in your house."

Ravana threw that lotus into the sea. That flower was carried away by the waves of the sea, fell in the sacrificial ground of king Janaka and was hidden under the soil. Vedavati who had been covered under the soil in *Krita Yuga* was reborn as Sita.

Ravana had again started moving around the world on the plane.

At a place called Usirabija, a king named Marutta was performing sacrifice.

Ravana called that king for a fight.

All the gods who came for the sacrifice fled away in disguise. Indra in the guise of a peacock, Yama as a crow, Varuna as a swan — and so on.

Though Devendra fled away, king Marutta started for the battle. Priests stopped the king saying that one should not go to the battle during sacrifice.

Ravana declares that he had won the battle and eaten away the sages who had attended the sacrifices. (*Have you noticed? You should not go to places where sacrifices are held. There you will find many disgusting things!*)

All the gods — who ran away as soon as Ravana arrived — gave great boons to the birds whose forms they had assumed. Indra gave a boon to the peacock thus, "Peacock! Hereafter your tail will shine with a thousand eyes. When it rains you will play." (*When the enemy arrives, I will run away!*)

(*Before this boon was given, was the tail of peacocks without colours? Did the peacocks remain in a corner without playing?*)

Yama gave a book to the crow, "O crow! Unless some body kills you, you will not face death. (*If somebody kills you, you will die. Then, the boon will not work!*) You will not catch diseases. If you eat the food offered to the dead ancestors, the dead will be satisfied.

Varuna's boon to the swan: "Swan! Your skin will become white, smooth and beautiful. (*Were Swans both black and white colours together?*)

Kubera gave a boon to the chameleon that its body would shine in a golden complexion.[471]

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471. Unaware of the reasons for many things in nature, humans fabricate various kinds of stories with various kinds of imagination. Unaware of the reason why so many colours are present in the peacock's tail, we have a story that 'Indra gave it a boon!' Each country has a story about the tail of the peacock. We have to understand that such stories are created because of lack of knowledge about nature. ★

(It is all right, O god! Who will give you the boon that enables you to stand and not run away when enemies come?)

Ravana went around all the kings. "Come for the battle. Or else accept your defeat", he provoked everybody.

Dushyanta, Pururava, Gaya and all other kings shrewdly admitted their defeat.

Ravana also came to Ayodhya. Then Anaranya was ruling Ayodhya. He fought with Ravana. But, he was defeated totally and fell down from the chariot. "Ravana! The man who will kill you will be born in our Raghu dynasty. A king called Dasaratha will be born. He will beget a great king called Sri Rama. He will kill you", said he and gave up his life.

Ravana again started roaming about and talked to Narada who was walking in the midst of clouds, "Are you fine?"

"I am fine, but… why do you fight battles with human beings? Human beings struggle with diseases, worries and old age. You select some body that suits you. Fight with Yama."

Saying 'yes', Ravana turned his plane and started towards Yama's world.

Narada went to Yama's world before Ravana reached and informed Yama, "Ravana is coming to fight a battle against you."

Entering Yama's world Ravana saw how Yama's soldiers were torturing sinners. Yama's soldiers were cutting up some people with swords and putting them in salt. They were making dogs pull out the flesh of some sinners. They were rolling some people in the fiercely burning sand. They were throwing some people naked into urine and excreta. The sinners were weak like skeletons, seized with huger and thirst and were running hither and thither in fear.[472]

Now about those who did pious acts: Those who gave donations and charities were eating '*pancha bhakshya paramaannaalu*' (five kinds of sweets made of rice and ghee). Those who had donated houses were sauntering in celestial buildings. Those who donated gold and silver were happily adorning themselves with many ornaments. (*Perhaps, they always give milk, curds and ghee to those who donated cows without donating food! Those who donated houses have to be satisfied with celestial mansions only. No food for them. Those who donated gold have to carry golden jewels with a hungry belly!*)

On seeing the entire Yama's world, Ravana released all those who were suffering at the hands of Yama's soldiers. (*Ah! Ravana! This is the greatest aspect of your history! This is something that can pardon all your wrong doings!*) Yama's soldiers got angry and began to fight with Ravana.

A fierce battle!

Finally Yama raised his *Kala Dandam* ('staff of death') to throw at Ravana. Then Brahma came running and begged Yama, "Alas! Don't throw it! Don't throw it! Listen to me! I have given a boon to Ravana that he will not face death at the hands of gods. If he dies my words will be untrue. Moreover, I alone have created this Kala Dandam also. I gave a boon that it would not go waste if it is used. In case this does not work on Ravana, my word will be untrue. (Both ways, i*t is wrong whether it works or does not work!*) Therefore, do not do any thing." (*The boon which Brahma had given to Ravana works well only if none kills him! The boon given to Kala Dandam also works only if it is kept unused. How great are these boons!*)

"Then why the hell should I sit around and see things if I cannot kill any one?", said Yama irritably and disappeared.

Thus Ravana conquered Yama.

Ravana went into the nether world from the sea. (*In the airplane!*)

There Daityas (people of a particular race) came to fight him. The battle between Rakshasas and Daityas went on without any result. Meanwhile Brahma came running and said to Daityas, "Gods cannot conquer Ravana.

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472. All the tortures, which people allegedly suffer in Yama's world are nothing but the tortures, which enemies inflict on their enemies! Whatever tortures enemies inflict are the tortures of Yama's world! To understand these things more exactly, all these tortures were those, which slave masters inflicted on the slaves at the emergence of the slave-owning society. ★

(*This is the boon that I have given him!*) You make friends with Ravana." (*Should Brahma have to run after those whom he has given boons?*)

Later Ravana fought a battle with Kalakeyas. In that battle he killed Surpanakha's husband.

Later he went to Varunaalaya. There he saw *Kaama Dheenu*. (A cow). It gives milk at all times in all seasons. The sea of milk was born out of its milk. The moon came out of that sea of milk. (*So, moon means lump of butter?*)

When Ravana went to Varunaalaya, Varuna was not there. He came to know that Varuna had gone to Brahma's world to listen to music. (*Instead of going for sacrifices, he went to a music recital. Good taste!*)

Ravana fought with Varuna's sons, defeated them and left that place.

Then he went to the city of Asna. At the door of a big mansion, he saw a big form of a male. That form said to Ravana, "If you want to fight with me do it here. If you want to fight with the Emperor Bali, go inside."

Ravana went inside. Bali looked at Ravana, showed him a wheel-like thing at a distance and asked him, "Get that Kundala (ear ring) here. Though Ravana tried to lift it, he could not lift it.

Then Bali said, "It is my grand father's earring. His name is Hiranyakasipu. When he was fighting at that time, this ear ring had fallen down here. Sri Mahavishnu killed such a great warrior. The one who was guarding at the door is that Maha Vishnu. You also worship Maha Vishnu!" (*Like Vibhishana, Emperor Bali is also a renegade? This man is Hiranyakasipa's grand son, isn't he? Which means, is he the son of Prahlada?*)

Ravana angrily ran outside to quarrel with Vishnu.

Grasping that Ravana was coming, Vishnu disappeared without fighting with him since Ravana had Brahma's boon. As Vishnu was not visible, Ravana left that place.

Later Ravana went to the world of the sun. He sent a word to the Sun through Prahasta.

"Will you come for a fight or admit your defeat?"

The sun wore red garments, garlands and golden jewels. On hearing Prahasta's words, he called his gate keeper and said, "Dandi! I do not have time. I cannot waste my time. (*Sun! What a nice word you said!*) You go to the battle. Otherwise admit that you have lost the battle. (*Yes, one has to be very clear.*)

Dandi said to Ravana, "My master has asked me to fight with you"

Ravana laughed and left. Then Ravana started for the world of the moon. On his way, while going in his chariot, he saw a man fondling a woman. Then Ravana called a passer-by named Parvata and asked him, "Who is that gentleman in that chariot?" Parvata said, "He has done great penance. That's why he is going to heaven."

Meanwhile, Apsarasas (celestial nymphs) were dancing and taking another gentleman in another chariot.

"This gentleman fought without turning his back in the battle. That is why he is going to heaven."

In this manner, Ravana saw many people. Whosoever he called out refused to fight with him. All were going to heaven.

The king of Ayodhya, Mandhata too was going to heaven. Ravana called Mandhata also for fighting. Mandhata began to fight. Ravana's grand father was Pulastya. He came to know about this through his divine sight, rushed immediately, reprimanded his grandson, made Mandhata and Ravana friends and stopped the battle.

Ravana went higher and higher above the sky, crossed the sphere of Vayu, (*Vayu mandala*) reached the Moon's sphere (*Chandra mandala*) and began to fight with Indra. (*Alas! Moon! Why do you fight with that stupid fellow? Admit your defeat, you see! You will be free from his menace. Shed light happily!*)

Brahma came running. "Ravana! Don't shoot arrows at the moon. He does good for the world. I will tell you a mantra (spell) that will make you fearless while you are in danger", Brahma told him a very long mantra.

It had the names of all gods!

Later, Ravana entered a cave and went further inside, searching. Inside the cave all people had four hands each.

Narayana lay on the bed of a snake. Lakshmi Devi sat on a throne and fanned her husband. (*Even if a woman sits on a throne, service to her husband is compulsory!*)

Ravana caught hold of Lakshmi Devi. Narayana looked at Ravana angrily. With that look Ravana fell down, got up and went away.

While returning to Lanka, Ravana took all the beautiful women whom he saw on his way in his plane.

As he entered Lanka, Surpanakha came to him and cried, "You have killed my husband. Now what is left for me?"

Ravana consoled his sister. "I did it in the battle unaware. Do not worry. Live in Dandakaranya with Khara", he convinced her and went into Lanka.

Indrajit was performing sacrifice in Nikumbhila vana. He had received boons from Siva also.

On seeing his son's activity, Ravana said irritably, "Doing sacrifice is not a good thing, my boy! All the gods are our enemies, aren't they? Why do you worship them?"

"All right! Whatever has happened has happened! Come on!", he took his son along with him from Nikumbhila vana.

All the women whom Ravana had brought along got off from the plane grieving.

On seeing them, Vibhishana reprimanded his brother. "You have harassed these women and brought them here. Like you, Madhuvu abducted our Kumbhinasi". Ravana became furious and at once went to attack Madhuvu.

Kumbhinasi wanted to marry Madhuvu. That's why she begged her brother and made him a friend of her husband.

From there Ravana went to Kailasa. It was night. The weather was pleasant.

He saw Rambha going to her lover. Ravana desired her. Rambha refused. Without listening to her and however much she opposed him, Ravana molested Rambha.

Rambha went crying to her lover Nalakubara and reported every thing that had happened. Unable to control his anger, Nalakubara cursed Ravana, "Ravana's head will break into a thousand pieces if he molests a woman who does not like him." Ravana also heard that curse.

Later Ravana went to fight against Devendra.

Devendra went to Vishnu and prayed to him.

Vishnu nodded his head negatively. "Ravana is arrogant because of the boons. It is no use if I confront him now. I will kill him after some time. (*By then the boons will become old.*) For the present you fight with him", said Vishnu. (*Indra! When Vishnu himself is unable to fight, how can you! Run!*)

Devendra started fighting. In that fierce battle, Savitra, one of the gods killed Sumali who was in the chariot of snakes. Indrajit angrily fought with Jayanta, son of Devendra. Fearing that danger will befall Jayanta, his grand father took him away and hid him in the sea. (*There is no danger if he sinks in the sea!*)

As Jayanta was not seen, Indra angrily started the battle. Ravana asked Indrajit to relax for some time and came to fight with Indra.

Devendra killed the charioteer of Ravana, felled the chariot, held Ravana as hostage and took him to heaven. Immediately Indrajit went to fight. He fought fiercely with Indra, held Indra hostage and rescued his father. "Now all the three worlds are yours. Let us go to Lanka! Stop fighting", he said to his father.

Ravana said, "All right! Tie Indra to the chariot and take him to Lanka."

Indrajit tied Indra to the chariot and took him to Lanka.

Gods ran to Brahma. Brahma ran to Lanka. He praised Ravana a lot.

"You have conquered all the three worlds", he said. *After praising and praising and praising,* at the end he said, "Release Indra".

"I will release him, but give me a boon so that I will not die", Indrajit asked Brahma.

"No. How is it possible?" said Brahma.

"All right, give me another boon. Before I go to the battle, I will offer oblation to the god of fire. Immediately, a chariot of the god of fire must come for me. If I fight from that chariot, I should not face death. If I do not complete fire oblation, the mistake will be mine. If I get death then, it is not your fault."

"All right!" said Brahma. He took Indra with him.

Feeling very shy, Indra sat. (*Indra! Do you still have sense of shame? All your shame might have been exhausted, isn't it?*)

Brahma reprimanded Indra and said, "This is the consequence of your sin. When I created Ahalya as the most beautiful woman, you thought I would give her to you. But I gave her to Gautama since he was a good man. (*Indra! Your mentality has been like this since the beginning!*) Unable to control your anger, you molested Ahalya. Because of that sin now you face this humiliation. Your son Jayanta is safe in the sea. Perform Vaishnava sacrifice. You will be free of all sins." Devendra performed that sacrifice and became pious and famous again.

Agastya narrated to Rama the story so far and resumed the eulogy of Rama's valour again, "Indrajit is the one who conquered Indra. Such a man has fallen in front of your valour!"

Rama said, "Every thing is all right. But, how could the Rakshasas behave as they like on this earth so far? Were there no capable kings to suppress the Rakshasas? (*Rama wanted others say, "Who else is there except you?"*)

Agastya resumed his narration. "Ravana went to fight with Karta Viryarjuna. Arjuna had a thousand hands. Then he was sporting with all his wives in the river Narmada. To show his heroism he put his hands to stop the flow. The river surged backwards. (*All great acts are in front of wives!*)

Then all the flowers which Ravana had kept for the worship of Siva were scattered in the water. Then Ravana looked at that river like a wife who has defied (her husband)[473]

He sent his ministers to find out the reason. They jumped into the sea and saw what was happening beneath the sea. Arjuna spread his hair across the river, gathered his wives around him, occupied the entire river like a big mountain, put his hands across the waters and playing.

Ravana called Arujuna for a fight. Both of them combated.

Arjuna held Ravana and dragged him into the city. Pulastya, who was in heaven, heard about this and went to the city of Mahishmati.

Out of respect for Pulastya, Arjuna released Ravana.

Thereafter, Ravana met with humiliation another time.

While Vali was doing *Sandhya vandanam* (morning/evening prayer) in the sea. (*Does it mean fishing?*) Ravana walked slowly from behind Vali in order to catch him. Vali let Ravana come closer and suddenly caught him in his arm pit. As if he was unaware of Ravana's presence, Vali went round the four seas, said his prayers and then released Ravana.

Ravana fell down, rose up, felt very happy to see Vali's strength and made friends with him. "Let us enjoy together my riches, wealth, my wife and children."

Vali agreed.

"Rama! Vali was such a great warrior. You killed such a man", said Agastya. (*If it were not stealthy, your Rama too would have met the same fate of hanging in the arm pit of Vali like Ravana!*)

After hearing every thing, Rama asked, "Sage! Ravana and Vali are stronger but Hanuman is more powerful than they are, isn't he? Even Vishnumurthi could not do such daring acts which Hanuman has performed. When Vali chased Sugriva towards Rishyamuka, why did Hanuman keep quiet without killing Vali?" (*You should have asked Hanuman! Why do you ask Agastya now?*)

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473. Uttara kanda, sarga 37, sloka 8: "On seeing his half-finished worship of Siva, he looked at River Narmada as if he looked at the wife who has defied the custom."

Just as the flowing back of a river is very unnatural, defying of rules (customs) by a woman is such an unnatural thing. This means, women had been defying customs there!

But 'defiance' by the wife is a major reason for the anger of man. ★

"Rama! I will narrate the entire history of Hanuman! Listen!" (*Oh, No!*) Agastya resumed again. "When Hanuman was very young, his mother left her child at home and went to the forest for fruits. Then small Hanuman felt very hungry. Seeing the sun, he thought him to be a fruit and jumped towards the sky.

Thinking that something was coming to swallow the sun, Indra hit Hanuman with *Vajraayudham* (diamond weapon). The small Hanuman fell down and fainted. Hanuman's father was the god of wind. He got angry and stopped blowing everywhere.

Then all the gods came and gave boons that Hanuman will not face death. (*A while ago, they said that it was not possible to give such boons*). They said all have to face death. Then how could they give that boon? Among these gods, *whoever opens his mouth* we hear only lies!)[474]

Since then Hanuman used to go to the hermitage of sages, tear their clothes, break their pots, extinguish their fire and trouble them in many ways. All the sages angrily cursed Hanuman, "You possess strength. But you cannot realise your strength. (*Oh, I see! But all people knew about that curse, didn't they? Jambavan encouraged Hanuman to cross the sea, didn't he? Similarly, Sugriva and others could have reminded him of his strength for killing Vali as well, couldn't he?*)

Since the days of that curse, Hanuman had been acquiring education. He learnt *Vyakaranam* (Grammar) from the sun", said Agastya.[475]

"It is good.... Ruksharajas was the father of Vali and Sugriva. Who was their mother", asked Rama. (*You should have asked Sugriva!*)

Agastya began his narration again. (*A filthy story!*) "Ruksharajas himself was their mother. One day Ruksharajas, while drinking water in a lake, saw his own shadow and thought there was an enemy in the lake. So he jumped inside the lake. Immediately he became a woman. Indra and sun saw that woman while going in the sky. Immediately they ejaculated. Indra's semen fell on the head of that woman and the sun's semen fell on her neck. Vali was born from the hair of the head and Sugriva was born from the neck. Later, that woman changed into a man.

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474. Uttara kanda, sarga 40, sloka 55:

Gods were telling Brahma that the god of wind is not allowing the wind to move. "You made wind as the lord of life. We do not know the reason. He stopped our life, stopped our breath in our bodies and made us motionless just as women are confined in a harem."

It seems gods have realised that just as one feels when his breath is stopped women also feel the same way when they are confined in the harem!

Is it the poet's intention to say, "It is very difficult for women to languish in the harems. They must be freed." No. Women must be within confines. But the poet knows such confinement is a matter of grief for women. ★

475. After the story of Hanuman at the end of sarga 43, all the sages (including Agastya) took permission from Rama and went back to their respective hermitages.

In **sarga 42**, A day passed after Sri Rama's coronation. He slept that night happily and woke up next day with eulogies, "Rama! Your form, your lustre, your handsomeness, your family, your....., your....." He adorned himself and sat in the assembly for the first time.

Ascetics narrated stories again. In **sarga 43**, Rama talks to Agastya once again.

Of course, devotees of Valmiki dismiss this as an interpolation. All right, Valmiki did not write this. Then, why did Gilmiki write? When he wrote at one place that Agastya has left, why did he write that Rama talked to Agastya again? ★

This is the story of the birth of Vali and Sugriva. Whoever listens to this story, all their desires will be fulfilled". (*If they did not listen to this filthy story, their heart would be free. That is better!*)

"I will also narrate why Ravana abducted Sita. Listen", Agastya started again. (*When will you leave him, sir!*)

"In '*Krita yuga*', Ravana once asked sage Sanat kumara, "Who is the next powerful among gods?" Sanat kumara said, "Narayana is powerful. If some one dies in the hand of Narayana, he will have no rebirths. In 'Treta yuga', Narayana alone will be born as Rama. Ravana wanted to die at your hands in order to avoid rebirth. That's why he was hostile to you". (*Then, why don't sages and devotees die at the hands of Narayana?*)

Once Ravana asked Narada, "You have seen all the worlds. In which world there are strong people?"

"In Sweta island", said Narada.

Ravana went to Sweta island. Women there held Ravana like a child, held him tightly, threw him here and there, played with him like a ball and finally threw him into the sea.

Ravana came out of the sea and asked Sanat kumara, "All right!....Who created these worlds?

"Who can create them? It was Vishnu. We do not know about his birth. Learned people say that he fulfils the lives of all people. (*Well said! Without claiming that you alone know about Vishnu!*) Women who were born from the exhalation of Vishnu threw you into the sea."

"How will that god appear? When can we reach him?"

"He is present every where. Those who believe him to be their refuge and worship him will be able to see him. After the twenty eight epoch arrived, you will worship in '*Vaivaswata manvantaram*' and reach an imperishable world", said Sanat kumara.

Rama! You are Narayana. Ravana abducted Sita only for the sake of death at your hands."

Rama heard all these things and felt extremely happy.

Later all the sages went back to their hermitages, carrying the bundles of gold and silver.

★ ★

A month has passed.

(*Rama wanted to get rid of all those who had come to attend his coronation ceremony.*)

Rama gave gifts to king Janaka and said, "O king! Bharata will come to see you off. Now, you go to your city." Janaka gave all those gifts to Sita and went to his kingdom.

Rama said to Bharata's maternal uncle, "Your father has grown very old. Now he cannot bear the burden of the kingdom. It is better for you to go now."

"All right! I will go", said Yudhajit and went away.

Rama had called Bharata's maternal uncle also for his coronation! (*Fourteen years ago, when he decided to celebrate his coronation, he tried to do it quickly even without calling Bharata.*)

Then Rama said to the king of Kasi, "Go back to your kingdom". He too returned.

Later, Rama said to 300 subsidiary kings, "You have all helped me a lot. When Ravana abducted Sita, Bharata came to know about it and mobilised all of you. Now, all of you may go back to your kingdoms."

(*Did Bharata bring the armies of subsidiary kings for the sake of battle in Lanka? So we have to presume that incidents of this kind are 'Interpolations'! The poets of these interpolations seem to be utterly senseless!*)

All the subsidiary kings saluted Rama in various ways and went away, narrating Rama's story (*how Rama behaves with subsidiary kings*). After returning to their kingdoms, they sent many kinds of gifts, beautiful women, sheep and goats. (*Beautiful women for Rama?*)

Later Rama said to Sugriva and Vibhishana also, "Go back to your kingdom!" (*How long will you sit here?*) [476]

He hugged everybody and they left.

The Pushpaka plane called Rama with a low voice from the sky, "Rama! Kubera has asked me to go back to you!"

"All right! Come to me whenever I call you. Until then go somewhere", said Rama.

(*It seems Rama is tired of a lot with relatives. He is asking every body to go away!*)

The Pushpaka flew away on its wings.

Rama is happy in Ayodhya.

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[Translation: **B.R. Bapuji**]

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476. Uttara kanda, sarga 48, slokas 5, 11, 18, 21 to 26: See how Rama says to everybody.

To King Janaka: "O Ruler of the Earth! Take gems and return to your city?"

To Bharata's maternal uncle: "O Ruler of the Earth! The king (Kaika's father) is very old. He will feel sorry for if you have not returned. So, it is proper for you to start today."

To king of Kasi: "O Ruler of the Earth! Return to the city of Kasi, which is ruled by you well.... and which is beautiful."

After bidding farewell to the king of Kasi, Rama looked at the three hundred kings with a smile and said, "Because of your kindness and valour, the wicked Ravana has died. Bharata brought you having heard that Ravana had abducted the daughter of king Janaka.... It has been a great delay for all of you who came for the battle. So, I think it is proper if all of you go back to your respective kingdoms."

Bharata, he says, had mobilized all these kings. (*They must be subsidiary kings*) came to Lanka with their armies and killed Ravana.

Now, all of you go back, says Rama. (*It seems he has lost his sense due to extreme joy of sitting on the throne!*)

Mr. Sundara Rama Sastrulu, who identified some sargas/slokas as Interpolations in *Uttara kanda*, did not consider these as Interpolations. So, Bharata mobilizing subsidiary kings and coming to Lanka is true! .....Of course this is an Interpolation. How could that Gilmiki write this?

It would be better if Bharata took some army, went to Lanka and fight. It is a mistake that the story did not proceed so. The poet (Valmiki or Gilmiki) realised this mistake and wrote this way — Any way he never thinks whether the earlier narration and the subsequent narration are coherent.

The poet made Rama say that Bharata had come to Lanka with his troops.

See what Rama was saying to Sugriva. (**Uttara kanda, sarga 50, up to sloka 7**).

"O gentle one! Sugriva! Go to Kishkindha which is invincible to Devas and Asuras!"

To Vibhishana: "Vibhishana! Rule Lanka with justice.... Go to Lanka!"

In this manner, Rama himself said to every body, "Now, go back! Go back!" It would be nice if those who came said, "Rama! Now we will go back" Does it look nice if Rama himself told them to go back? Sugriva and Vibhishana themselves asked Rama then, "We will come to your country". It is wrong not to call them at that time and also it is wrong to ask them to go back now. — Well, does the poet not know such things?

★

Story-16

The Beauty of R*ama Rajya!*

Asokam under the moonlit sky.

A garden around Sita's harem. As the entire garden was fully blossomed, the wind was filled with fragrance. Each time, the wind was carrying different kinds of fragrance from the trees.

"Sita! Where have you been all these years?" ask trees.

"Sita! Don't you know us?" say the new plants and birds.

There were many trees and many birds in the garden, which Sita had not seen!

Sita.... going around the entire garden.... at each plant.... along with her maidservants.... narrated to them all her hardships in the forest.... as stories.

While the maids shed tears, every evening the garden heard the joyful narration of Sita — who had overcome all the hardships.

"What a devoted wife you are, Madam! We have not seen a noble woman like you any where." How happy Sita was while other women praised her like this! At that moment, she wished that she should live in hardships for a thousand more births!

However..... even amidst that joy, she was little worried! The grief pinched her — her husband still doubted her! There was still a doubt in his mind. He was still anxious.

"How do I make him believe? How do I satisfy him?..... How base is a woman's life? Man's mercy alone is woman's protection, isn't it? However much I swing in riches and wealth, however much I attain fame and reputation, life has become peace less! Will this be like this for this birth? Which gods should I beg to make my husband believe me?......." Sita is still worried.

Even though lost in such thoughts, Sita is excited to roam about in her dear Asoka garden and see new flowers and birds.

"Madam! You are very tired. Sit for a while on this platform", the maids sat Sita on the bank of the lake. With flower creepers, the platform is like a flowery bush. With the moon slid into the water and with fully blossomed flowers, the lake was like a starry sky.

The wind, at each moment was bringing a new fragrance.

As the king arrived, all the maids arranged liquor, meat, drinks and stood at a distance.

Rama was full of joy since his coronation. Day and night, amidst royal affairs, visits of subsidiary kings, the hosting of relatives, fame and reputation among fellow kings.....

After such a long time he had stabilized — in his kingdom!

An obstacle to the coronation, which must have taken place when I was young... forest life.... the past, had passed amidst hardships... in grief on the one hand and in hope on the other.

Now I am the head of Kosala. I am the imperial head over many subsidiary kings.

Still many royal affairs are not clear. People's response is not clear. Do people like my rule or Bharata's?

What do people think about my accepting the kingdom?.... What do they think about accepting my wife.

Joy all the while when I am immersed in royal affairs.

When I return to the harem my heart becomes anxious... painful.... restless..... Will any body mention about Sita? Will they ridicule me? This is the doubt!

"Sita is noble. A great devoted wife. All the elders have agreed. Hence I have accepted Sita", he tries to utter, as if he is talking to somebody.

Suddenly he stops uttering.

"Have I rushed in accepting Sita? Do I not believe Sita's nobility?" Rama keeps arguing with himself.

If he looked at Sita, all thoughts of Rama begin to travel into the past… into Lanka."

"Lord!"

Rama moved a little bit and looked afresh at Sita keenly. Rama always feels that form of address as a *feast to his ears*. Now, there is more humility in Sita's behaviour. More obedience and modesty are seen. This Sita is not the Sita of forest life. Rama looked at Sita thoughtfully.

"Have I disturbed your thoughts?"

Rama nodded and kept silent with a smile — as if he had pardoned his wife.

"Are you tired of your duties, my Lord? Please accept this wine!"

He took the goblet.

Looking at the moon sliding into the lake, Sita said, "This garden has changed so much that I doubt if this were our garden. Have you noticed it, my Lord? Even after many days when I look at it, I still feel strange. This *Ponna* tree beside these steps…. when it first grew, how huge it had become! It appears as if somebody has brought all these huge trees and planted them here.

By the time when we left, these bushes of red flowers were not there on the bank of this lake. Even this Sandal tree was a small plant at that time…. Now?.... It has become a huge tree.

By the time they started for the forest life, Rama's doubt about Sita too was a small sprout. But now?

"My Lord! Look over there! Those *Vegisas, Loddugus, Saptaparnas*… all of them… how they have grown with age! Even the birds all over the garden… how many new kinds they are! I feel as if they ask me, 'Sita! Have you come? Have you noticed us?' What should I tell them?.... I laugh at them…."

Raising her head, Sita talked with smiles.

Her cheeks shone in the moon light. The shadows of her hair moved on her cheeks.

"Such a beautiful woman… That wicked man…. Frowning, Rama put the goblet down.

As something struck in her mind, Sita looked happy.

"In annihilating the enemy… about your valour… all our relatives…"

Rama smiled gracefully. For a long while, he looked silently and mercifully nodded his head.

"Pregnant women wish many kinds of things. You are… any…"

Feeling shy, Sita lowered her head with a smile.

Rama's thoughts scattered… moved somewhere and were tangled up. He looked up at Sita very keenly.

"….Don't you wish for anything?"

"I wish to serve at your feet, my Lord!"

"Nothing else….?"

"I should have the fortune of receiving your mercy always. I will not wish for anything else!"

Rama looked at her with wonder. Does she not have any wish? Is she so happy that she does not have any other wish? Is it true?... But… for me…. the kingdom of that Kasi…. the kingdom of those Gandharvas…. that….!"

All the thoughts of Rama moved haphazardly around expansion of his kingdom, the disobedience of subsidiary kings, chastity of his wife and eulogy by relatives and friends!

"My lord! When we were in Chitrakuta… once… some time just before Bharata's arrival…."

"Why memories of those days? Have this drink!"

"Yes, we cannot bear that miserable forest life today even in imagination. These riches, luxuries, fame, reputation — all these give pleasure, my lord! However,… occasionally… that Chitrakuta… the bank of the river Ganga in Panchavati… those memories are still there. Some relaxation for you from the burden of work….a temporary change…won't you like that? Let us see once more all those hermitages… our cottage…

"After having faced many hardships in the forests for fourteen years….to go again for relaxation in the forests?...."

"…Lord!" After her husband had become the king, Sita had not interacted as freely as before. Her respect had increased. "Now… even in forests, maidservants who will do all kinds of service will follow us. Now we will not have the previous difficulties and sorrow.

My heart is eager to give gifts to the wives of all the sages."

Sita's heart was eager not only to give gifts but also to narrate the episodes of her conjugal fidelity and see surprise and joy on their faces.

Rama was lost in thoughts.

★ ★

Rama's entire thoughts were concentrated on finding out what people think about his rule.

Since he had become of aware things in general in his boyhood, Rama had been interested in the kingship only. Of all the skills, he had learnt most about ruling the kingdom.

Rama, who has been waiting to begin ruling the kingdom, is involved in those kingly duties.

He combined the knowledge of ruling the kingdom, which he had learnt from the scriptures, with the experience of his ancestors, Rama modified all his royal affairs in accordance with his own politics in a short time immediately after his coronation.

He studied the anatomy of Bharata's kingship and modified it wherever he was not satisfied.

He at once implemented in his administration all the principles of politics, which he had preached to Bharata.

He shifted people of upper castes from lower positions to higher positions. He got some employees removed. He appointed some people afresh. He pulled some people to higher positions. He pushed some to lower positions.

He reduced the salaries of his employees. He also reduced the holidays and rest period.

He gave away gifts most liberally to the higher-grade employees who made efforts to maintain discipline among people by means of coercion.

He appointed spies afresh over all the higher-grade officials.

Also spies over spies!

Again spies over those spies!

He was obliged to stop appointing spies at some point.

He is satisfied with the information which his spies gathered — regarding whether all the higher-grade employees are loyal to him or not. Yet, he found no satisfaction.

He provided privileges to all the prominent merchants. Rama knew pretty well that he ought to protect merchants with special care and merchants alone support the king.

He followed the policies to attract Brahmins, elders, scholars, warriors, his right hand men and all those who favoured his administration. He reduced felicitations to actors, clowns and singers. It was Rama's opinion that people become lazy due to entertainment.

He ordered that people must devote their entire time to the worship of gods and ancestors, contributions to Brahmins, sacrifices and hosting relatives and friends.

He increased measures for the safety of royal harems. The compound walls round the harems were increased in height.

He introduced strict rules that king's employees should not reveal political secrets either to their wives or mothers or to *any female worm*!

He declared scriptural duties that all women must have fear and follow the commands of their men; that wives should be obedient to their husbands, sons to their fathers and servants to their master and people should enjoy their sexual pleasures only during the nights!

He examined his armed forces and felt extremely unhappy. He began to expand his cavalry, 'elephantry', infantry and army as a whole.

Rama — who knew that soldiers turn disobedient if they do not receive their salaries in time — made arrangements so that soldiers got their salaries and allowances in time.

He declared the rule that all the commanders must be ready to occupy other kingdoms and to expand the kingdom at any moment.

He amended the law more rigorously. Death penalty to those who did not believe in god and those who propagated atheism!

Exile to men and women who mixed castes.

Torture to those castes that created violence to money and comforts of Brahmins.

Imprisonment to those who defy the

morality of scriptures as well as society.

As soon as he took the reins of state power, Rama implemented many death sentences.

Rama could implement autocratically and as per scriptures all those changes, which Bharata had hesitated to implement.

Rectifying the loopholes in the kingdom, Rama felt relieved.[477]

Carrying out all the royal affairs intelligently and skilfully and immersed in the royal pleasures, which he had dreamt of while he was in exile, Rama spent his time.

Daily, he woke up in the morning with the praise of his sycophants.

The sycophants daily sang in praise of the Raghu dynasty. They eulogize the king. "O king! Hero of the heroes! Lion among men! It is dawning, wake up! You are a Vishnumurti in valour. You are a Brihaspati in intellect. Mother Earth (*Bhuudeevi*) in forbearance. A Sun in lustre. Wind in terms of speed. Samudra (sea) in serenity. Moon in delicacy. No king has been born so far on the earth who is as virtuous as you are and who wished the welfare of the people."

Rama wakes up with pride after hearing the songs which his sycophants have sung so far for the ancestors and which they will sing for his sons and grand sons.[478]

Feeling sorry as to what would have happened to the people on this earth if the Raghu dynasty had not emerged — especially if he had not been born — Rama completes his bath and adornments by very young women.

Sitting on the gem-studded throne in the assembly and sprinkling *serene* smiles, Rama listens to the poets who sing about 'Rama Rajya' (*Rama's Rule*)!

"The rains fall in time in Rama's kingdom. The moon always shines coolly. The people swing in riches and wealth. There are no snakes in Rama's kingdom. No diseases. No thieves. No undesirable happenings. No violence. No grief.

In Rama's kingdom, all the trees grow abundantly with green leaves. They look pleasing with fruits and flowers.

In Rama's kingdom, people always narrate stories about Rama only. The entire kingdom echoes with the name of Rama — 'Rama!' 'Rama!'. The earth itself is filled with Rama."[479]

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477. Rama's sermons to Bharata in Chitrakuta are the basis for this kind of presentation of Rama's rule. ★

478. Uttara kanda, sarga 42:

"O king! You are invincible to the enemies. You do not transgress *Dharma*. You do good for the people. Why was a king like you not born before? O best among men! Fame and Lakshmi (goddess of wealth) cannot leave you…" Sycophants praised these and other qualities.

Thus hearing such praises, Rama (all the kings) felt happy.

They praised Dasaratha also like this. Also his (Dasaratha's) father! His grand father as well. Rama must have heard them praising Dasaratha like this. Yet he feels happy when they praise him with the same words.

Every king thinks that he alone is great! Thinks that none like him was ever born! The tradition of making others praise us, eulogize us, felicitate us and the dirty narrow mindedness of deriving pleasure from such things have not yet left us! ★

479. Yuddha kanda, sarga 131, slokas 93 to 101: The following passage that describes the nature of Rama's kingdom is from the 'Yuddha kanda'. The poet describes Rama's kingdom as follows, after Rama's coronation. "While Rama was ruling, the grief of widows was not heard. (*In Rama's kingdom, women, perhaps, were so vexed that they felt very happy and relieved when their husbands passed away! That is why even the widows might not have grieved.*)

Snakes and diseases did not harass people. (*They had the king to harassing them! Then, is harassment of snakes a big thing?*)

➔

Hearing such eulogy, Rama gives gifts to the poets with *serene* smile and sends them away happily.

After those eulogies are over, Rama has some doubt somewhere — Are people so happy in Rama's kingdom? Are there no snakes really in Rama's kingdom?

That is why the entire concentration is on finding out what people think about his rule.

One day, he called his loyal spies and expressed his view — to get the pulse of the people!

"Lord! Except praising the king, do the people dare to think differently?" said spies. (*They are not spies, they are cheats!*)

"Openly people certainly praise the king. However, a real opinion of the people is what people talk secretly to each other in private. You have to gather those secrets." Rama is doubtful that, even though people praise him in the open they might speak otherwise in private. "You have to find out every thing. What they think about my coronation, about my wife, about my brothers especially Bharata and also about Kaika."

"Yes, Your Excellency!" All the spies left for the villages in disguise.[480]

★ ★

➔There were no thieves in the world. (*lookaha = the world; nirdasyuha = without thieves; abhavat = became. It was the poet's hope that Rama should rule the entire world! The poet excelled Rama in hopes!*)

While Rama was ruling, the entire universe was full of Rama. People told stories of Rama reciting, "Rama! Rama! Rama!" (*The poets were creating tons of lies!*)

Prosperous Rama, along with his brothers, ruled the kingdom for eleven thousand years. (*Alas! Were people entangled in Rama's kingdom for eleven thousand years?*) ★

480. Uttara kanda, sarga 53, sloka 5 to 11: Rama asked the spies as follows: "My citizens and villagers — What do they talk about me? What do they speak about Sita? What do they think of Bharata? What do they say about Lakshmana and Satrughna? What do they utter about my mother Kaika? They talk about the new government and the king, don't they?"

In response to this the spies said, "All the people are full of praise for your victory — that you killed the ten-headed fellow. (*dasagriva*, that is Ravana).

Again Rama asked, "Report to me in detail without leaving anything out — The good and the bad the citizens talk about.... I will hear all that and do good things. I will give up bad things. Also, inform me what the sinners in the villages say."

Have you noticed what Rama wanted to know? He can find out what people talk about him. But why does he want to know about Sita, Bharata and Kaika? What do people think about them, according to Rama? What does Rama want to know about them?

Is it Rama's apprehension to find out whether people were thinking that Sita is a chaste woman or not!

It is also his fear that people might not have anger for Kaika and appreciate her. That is why he is anxious to know the people's opinion of Kaika.

Rama knew that people would any way appreciate Bharata since he had given up the kingdom. But this is not enough. He would like to know what they talk about secretly in private. He suspects that people may be thinking why Bharata had to give up the kingdom.

A king who ought to know about people must know how people are and what their difficulties are. Will people benefit if the king comes to know what people think about his wife, brothers and step mother?

"Tell me what city people talk and the sinners in the villages talk," says Rama. This means, those who live in cities are very good people. They know what is good and what is bad. Rama➔

"What a noble man that Bharata is! Who will give up the kingdom *from his hand*."

"You are right! The other day our black hen went somewhere and laid an egg. Nobody came and said to us, 'Look! Your hen laid an egg in our house.' While this is so, will they give up a kingdom if they got it. No."

"Then why did Bharata give it up?"

"Why? Because he is an innocent man!"

"He is not that innocent, you see! He gave it because he knew he would get fame. That too, he gave it to his elder brother. Would he give it to any other man? If possible, will he not grab others' kingdom? If they live for ten more years. We can see who is how good!"

The kids are playing with the tops.

All the men who had finished their work gathered under a tree.

"I don't understand this. People say that Kaikamma asked for two boon — Bharata's coronation and Rama's exile to forest. Rama completed his exile and has returned. It is all right. But what about Bharata's coronation? Then they celebrated a coronation for Rama's sandals. Now Rama has celebrated it. Then what about Bharata's coronation?"

"You are right. This is a good point. Bharata has to celebrate coronation. Later, if he wants he can give it up to anybody."

The kids are quarrelling in a loud voice. Two brothers are fighting for a flute.

The mother is upset. "Alas! There is no amity between siblings! Look at king Bharata. He gave away even his kingdom. My lad! Give it to your elder brother!" the mother preached a sermon to the younger son and tried to inspire him to give away willingly whatever he had.

However, that young boy aspired to enjoy all that he has himself, dismissed his mother's sermons and began to play the flute. Meanwhile the elder boy pounced on him like an eagle, kicked the younger brother, sat on him, pressed him to the ground, hit him, seized the flute and ran away.

The younger one fell on his face and began to wail and curse.

The mother lifted up the younger son and began to curse the elder boy. "Somehow you have seized it? To hell with you! Like Rama, what a nasty mentality you have? This time, when you come near me. See if I don't *tear your back*!" the mother too shouted all kinds of oaths which great warriors take.

"Has Bharata's coronation taken place or not? Has Rama followed his father's words? A quarrel on this issue went on in the meeting under the tree.

Finally, they concluded, "Rama fulfilled only one boon of Kaika. He has not at all fulfilled the second one."

"Between you and me. Poor fellow Sri Rama faced many hardships during his forest life. Is battle with Ravana a small thing? As he was a great hero, he could accomplish it. Did you notice how obediently Sugriva and Vibhishana behaved in front of Rama?"

"What is great if he is a hero! He brought back his wife whom another man had abducted. Moreover, he was born in a royal family. If it had been I? .... Would I have seen the face of such a woman again?" A great male twirled his moustache.

"Stop it. Even now, do you see the face of your wife. You see the faces of others' wives" People around him abhorred his attitude.

This gentleman *beats* his wife *to death* daily. That wife runs *towards a well or a ditch*!

"Sri Rama also said the same thing that you have uttered. After all the elders persuaded him, he realised that that woman is innocent and

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➔ says he will follow whatever the city people say 'right'. He will abandon whatever they say 'bad'. Who are those good people who live in the cities? The rich. They are business people. Therefore, Rama will act in accordance with them.

Now, the people who live in villages are sinners! A poor opinion of the village folk! Carelessness! They do not know what is good. All that they talk about is bad. If they are sinners and fools, why should he care to listen to their views? ★

brought her back home since he has the sense of what is good and what is bad. If he were like you…."

"Where does Rama have the manliness that I have! If the king himself had done such a shameless thing, what should people like us do? Can we control a woman, if we think morals are not necessary?"[481]

An old traveller who was sleeping on a rug under the tree got up coughing.

"What *grand father!* Are you going?"

"Yes, my lad! I take leave."

"*Grand father!* Why do you travel around the world in this old age?"

"I am curiously roaming to see with my own eyes how all people live in Rama's kingdom."

"I see. So, you too have the same craze. Like you, some people in our village have many hopes in Rama's rule. The other day a boy of our relatives came from Ayodhya. He works as a servant of a Brahmin family. He told us many things! Grand father! Is it so that all the poets write and sing songs that all people are indescribably happy in Rama's kingdom? Let it be so. They also wrote that there are no snakes in Rama's kingdom, is it true?

"I do not know, my son!"

"The king does not climb down from his mansion. The one who wrote it also does not get down from the mansion. Then where can they see snakes? It is enough if they come to the mounds of earth in the fields….. *Grand father!* You say you are visiting villages. Have you seen the poor or not? People like us were there in Dasaratha's kingdom, Bharata's kingdom and are like this in Rama's kingdom also. What has changed in Rama's kingdom?"

"Snake! Snake!" somebody shouted. People got up making a loud noise. Kids cried. Dogs barked. People ran toward a hut where the snake had intruded.

Whom did it want to bite? Does it or does it not know that this is 'Rama's kingdom'?

★ ★

Vijaya, Bhadra, Suraja, Kaliya and some other important spies stood in front of Rama with folded hands. All their faces were pale.

With *serene* glances, Rama looked at the spies.

"Bhadra! Are all people safe?"

"Yes, your Excellency! By your grace…."

"Submit the news that you have collected"

"Lord! The village folk are fools, aren't they?"

"So, what?"

"We heard many kinds of words. Good-bad, hardship-comfort, everything…."

"Submit! Do not delay!"

"Your Excellency! Pardon us. 'Sri Rama did not at all follow his father's words', they say."

"As Bharata's coronation as head of Kosala has not taken place, one of Kaika's wishes has

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481. Uttara kanda, sarga 53, slokas 16 to 20:

The words of the public. "….Abandoning reputation, Rama brought Sita to home. What is the use of Rama's reunion with Sita? Earlier, Ravana had kept Sita on his thigh and abducted her, hadn't he? Why didn't Rama feel disgust on getting back Sita who was taken to Lanka, kept in Asoka vana and kept under the custody of a Rakshasa? Should we also pardon our wives in the same manner? People follow whatever the king does, don't they?" — This is not the view of one single individual. The spies tell Rama that many people in the kingdom talked like this. (*In the story which we commonly hear outside this text, they say it was a washerman who made such comments. But there is no mention of a washerman in 'Uttara kanda'.*)

People who desperately looked for Rama's rule and who were ready to go to forests along with Rama — did they talk so insultingly about Rama? Then what respect will people have for Rama? What confidence will they have in Rama? Can the poet write that all people talked about Rama with ridicule? (*This is why, later poets shrewdly changed this as 'some mad washer man alone spoke like this'*)

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not been fulfilled, they say!....."

"Bhadra…."

"Pardon me, my lord! I am your slave…"

"Who said these words? In which village?"

"Not in one village. In many villages, we heard both praises as well as abuses about your Excellency. We need not heed the words of foolish people, my Lord!"

"What more did they say? Do not conceal anything. Tell me every thing!"

"Lord! Can we hurt the delicate heart of your Excellency?"

"Do not hesitate…. submit"

"In the case of the great chaste woman Sita Devi also…."

Rama heard every thing — His entire face turned red.

"Lord! Pardon us. It seems that ordinary people have no confidence in Rama's rule"

His Excellency remained silent *serene*ly.

The spies saluted and left.[482]

Rama was immersed in deep thought. Do people not have confidence in Rama's rule? Don't they have confidence in Rama and his decisions? What a terrible truth! What is my task in this situation? What is the way to tell about my noble qualities to people?

What is the action that can convince people that Sri Rama is a noble lord and sacrificed even his own pleasure for the sake of public opinion? I should make people forget their criticism. I have to attain fame that Rama follows pubic opinion. Only then, people will forget all their doubts. This attempt is a matter of reputation and fame!

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"Lakshmana!"

"What is your order, your Excellency?"

"Have you heard the public opinion? Slander against Sita? Accusations against me?" Rama's cheeks were wet with tears.

"Who are those wicked people? Which villagers? I will destroy all of them right now", Lakshmana took out his sword swiftly.

"It is wrong, my lad! The king ought to respect the people's opinion. In this situation coercion is not the solution."

"So?"

"Listen carefully! I called you with the confidence that you will not defy my order. Tomorrow morning, take Sita in a chariot, cross Ganga and drop her near sage Valmiki's hermitage. There is no other way except abandoning Sita"

"My Lord!"

"Even then I had wondered about this slander. I wanted to abandon her permanently then. However, all the elders persuaded and convinced me. I agreed that it was no fault of Sita's. But… again this slander…. is making me feel extremely shameful. I cannot bear the ridicule of people"

"Your Excellency! Kindly, pardon me and be patient. The king commands people; does he have to follow the people's words? The king has no need at all to care about the people's words, does he?"

"Lakshmana! Do not oppose my order. I will no longer bear the defamation that I have accepted my wife who stayed in another man's house. As long as there is disrepute, that human being will fall in hell and struggle. This is why, noble men are anxious for fame."

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482. "Kaika's wish is not fulfilled since Bharata's coronation has not taken place. — This report of the spies about people's opinion was not there in Valmiki *Ramayana*. In the original, there is merely a mention of what people said about Sita.

Rama had asked the spies to find out what people talk about Bharata and Kaika also, hadn't he? If the spies had not reported these things, what would have happened to Rama's command? Therefore, a mention must be made that the spies reported about Bharata and Kaika also.

What do people think about Bharata? They think, 'He gave away the kingdom to his elder brother. He is a very good man.' The spies have to tell this to Rama. Similarly, the spies have to report about Kaika and the others also.

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"My Lord! Will your fame get tarnished any time?"

"Yes, this is tarnishing it. I accepted my wife whom another man had insulted. I have no manliness. The world will laugh at me. It is already laughing. On abandoning my wife, I will attain fame. If I get disrepute, I will even abandon you, the siblings too, out of a similar fear. Then how important is a wife? As I get fame by abandoning Sita, I have decided like this for the sake of my fame."

"Lord!"

"Now, none of you need tell me. If you still try to tell me, hostility between you and me will be inevitable."

"......................"

"In Rama's kingdom, there was no value for the pleasure of the king. Public opinion alone had value. Sita wanted to visit wives of the ascetics. Take her for that reason!"

"Lord! .... Show mercy! Sister-in-law is pregnant...."

"You must. Sita does not deserve my mercy"[483]

★ ★

"Me alone to the forest?", wondered Sita.

"My brother is immersed in royal affairs. He ordered me to take you to the hermitages of ascetics"

"Is that so? We will go. We will take gifts for the wives of all the sages." Sita made travel preparations and got into the chariot.

The path was the same along which they had gone to the forests earlier . However, the absence of her husband's company caused disappointment. With the joyous feeling that she would report everything to him after she returned, Sita travelled happily.

They crossed the Ganga in a boat. They got down on the other side of the bank. In the past, their forest life had begun from this spot. How much grief they had had at that time!"

Sita looked at the surroundings.

Lakshmana fell down at her feet and cried loudly.

Sita was confused and felt strange. "What is this my lad?"

"Mother! Death is better for me than this punishment", Lakshmana shed tears profusely.

"Alas! Why are you wailing without telling me any thing?"

"I can't say it, you *can't hear*"

"Gather courage, my lad! Was the king angry with you? Has he banished you? Tell me"

"Mother! Will I wail for my sake? The king

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483. Uttara kanda, sarga 55, slokas 13 to 25:

Rama's words to Lakshmana: "City people and villagers abuse me.... As long as the words of infamy circulate, one *falls into hell*. All great people try to attain fame. Fearing slander, I will give up either my life or you. Then, where is the doubt about leaving Sita?.... On the other side of the bank of the Ganga, near river Tamasa, there is Valmiki's hermitage. Leave Sita over there at a spot where there are no people..... Do not speak to me about it again. Go! Do not argue. If any one of you opposes my decision, it will cause extreme hatred for you..... If you obstruct my wish, you will be hostile to me", thus Rama spoke harshly at Lakshmana.

Rama doubted Sita in Lanka, after the confirmation that Sita was a chaste woman, both of them came happily to Ayodhya, celebrated the coronation and lived happily — while the story was proceeding like this, why did the poet create a scene of Rama abandoning Sita? To show how virtuous a king Rama was and how fairly he ruled the kingdom. To say, "Rama respected public opinion (*while abusing those people!*) . He abandoned even his wife and protected the tradition, which guides the people. See what a good king Rama is !"

However, the people (those who ridiculed) did not ask him 'to abandon Sita again'. They asked, 'Why did he bring her at all? How did he do such an unmanly act?' According to the words of the people, bringing Sita home was tantamount to losing manliness. If he had kept her with him for some time and abandoned her because some one said something, can he regain manliness?★

has banished his own lawful wife. The foolish people are ridiculing the king for accepting you. To remove the blot on his name, the king has decided to abandon his lawful wife!"

Sita listened to him in shock. With unbelievable surprise, she asked in a trembling voice, "Lakshmana! What are you saying?"

"Pardon me, mother! I am not indendent. I follow the king's order. I am not guilty. Even the king is not guilty. Can the king defy public opinion in Rama's kingdom?"

Sita understood the entire matter. It was her husband's doubt that she was not a chaste woman. It was the doubt of the public as well. The result of this was the rejection. Sita's surprise turned into helplessness and grief. "Alas! Was I born to grieve throughout my life? Does Sita not have a place in Rama's kingdom, where even rural illiterate people also have respect? What sin have I committed? Who will be my saviour in these dense forests? What is the way for me except to give up my life by jumping into the Ganga?"

"Do not do such a thing, mother! There is Valmiki's hermitage nearby. There you can safely…."

"Alas! Do you want me – who has been abandoned by her husband — to live safely? Do you want me to become a helpless orphan and join hermitages? What should I answer if sages ask me, 'What wrong did you do? Why did your husband leave you?' Has my husband sent me to the forests with such deception? He used to say, 'Why do I need headship of this earth without Sita? Why do I need divinity?' Is it my husband — who said he would treat these forests as heaven if I accompanied him – who has rejected me? Does he not at all know my faultlessness and good character? Lakshmana! I knew always. He has always had doubts regarding my character. Though he accepted me in Lanka….." Sita suddenly stopped and felt ashamed. She shed a flood of tears.

Abusing the husband? What a sinful act it is? This is a punishment to me for the sin that I may have committed in some past birth! This is again a test for my conjugal fidelity. I have to happily fulfil my husband's wish. Happily…."

"Lakshmana! I too have the responsibility to remove disrepute, which my husband has got. I will happily carry on the order of my husband. My husband is a virtuous man. Highly venerable. For me, my husband is god, relative and a teacher. It is a matter of joy for me to give up even my life for the cause that pleases my husband.

Now you go back! Tell the king, as my submission, not to leave *Dharma* at any time! Give my salutations to all my mothers-in-law. Convey my regards to all those in the harem."

"Mother! I brought you here making you believe that I would take you back again…."

"What is your fault in that, my lad? You are carrying out the order of the king. I am carrying out my husband's order. We should not grieve. Do not worry about me. Start back quickly."

"Pardon me, mother! I am going", Lakshmana saluted Sita and turned back, lowering his head.

The boat that Lakshmana boarded disappeared from Sita's sight.[484]

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484. Uttara kanda, sarga 55, slokas 3 to 17: Sita's grief: "Lakshmana! Did Brahma give me this birth for the sake of grieving?...... I do not know what sort of a sin I had committed in the past birth! Whom did I separate from his wife!..... I followed the foot steps of Rama and lived in the forests. Now whom can I confide my grief? What reply should I give if the sages ask me, 'what wrong did you do, why did Rama leave you?' I will right now jump into the Ganga and give up my life….." Grieving thus for some time, finally Sita said, "Lakshmana! Follow the orders of the king. Leave me and go….. Convey my regards to all and inform them about my safety. (*Safety! In a dense forest!*)…. Tell my husband as my words: 'I have a lot of respect for you. I will serve you always….. You have abandoned me out of fear for disrepute. I am also obliged to remove that disrepute that you have got due to malice in the world…. For me, my husband alone is god. ➔

Ganga flowed steadily.

Sita's grief surged forward like the flow of the Ganga during the floods.

Fourteen years ago, in the shadow of her husband who was like a male lion….. she had lived safely for many years in these dense forests. To such a wife with good character…. Without mercy that she is pregnant… —Alas! Every moment I am attempting to recollect the duties of devoted wives and swallow my grief… but this conjugal fidelity did not stop grief from surfacing…."

"Sita! Don't you get angry with your husband?" *Sita asked Sita* angrily.

"Why not?....What have I said?.... Anger? with my husband?....How you talk? Angry with my husband? No. I do not get angry. I will not let it….."

"But, your husband has insulted you so much. Is it justified?"

"He knows what is fair and what is unfair. Whatever he does is fair!"

"Then why are you grieving?"

"No, I do not have grief. All my grief is because I am away from my husband and not because he has done me injustice. Don't you know I am a *great* devoted wife? Do you think I am an ordinary woman? Do I get angry with my husband? Do I abuse him? Do I grieve over my husband's decision?"

Sita's cheeks were bathed in tears.

Her lap was filled with tears.

However much she tried, she could not control her grief. She wailed in a loud voice as if the entire forest wailed with her.

She cried like an infant child who knows nought but to cry.

She cried like an innocent noble wife whom a rock-hearted husband doubted unjustifiably and had left in the dense forests. **485**

How long did she wail!.... For many epochs she wailed!.... She wailed and wailed!…. On seeing a sage in front of her she prostrated at the feet of that sage…. "O great sage! My husband…. afraid of accusations from the world…. left me in this dense forest." She cried again and again.

That sage was Valmiki.

When his disciples told him that a woman was wailing pathetically on the bank of the Ganga, Valmiki came to Sita.

➔ My husband alone is a relative. My husband alone is a teacher. Therefore, I have to primarily do whatever my husband wishes me to do, even at the cost of my life." Sita spoke in this manner.

Is Sita not sad as her husband had abandoned her? She is very sad. So sad that she wanted to die. Yet, remembering the duties of devoted wives, she is trying to suppress her grief.

Is it a characteristic of a truthful man not to tell the truth before they started and leave her in the forest with a false statement that they would come back after visiting the hermitage of the sages?

Could not Rama call Lakshmana and say, "Lakshmana! Keep Sita separately and take care of her safety!" Even if he wanted to abandon her, couldn't he have made other arrangements for her?

It so happens in society that husbands leave their wives like orphans. They do not make any arrangements for the abandoned wives. Nowhere does such arrangements are made. Those orphans go somewhere and live at the mercy of others.

With this commonsense only, the poet left Sita in the forests as a destitute. As there were no other means in society, the poet too couldn't imagine another solution. Even if it were Sri Rama Chandra, he had to send away his wife without any support. The poet too had to write the same.

While Rama was going to the forests, Valmiki's hermitage was in Chitrakuta. Now it is after the river Ganga. May be he shifted to this forest as he did not like Chitrakuta! ★

485. **Uttara kanda, sarga 58, sloka 23:** "….Sita, a devoted wife, not finding her husband, buried in grief, cried in the forest which resounded with the sounds of peacocks." ★

On learning about everything, he consoled, "Sita! Do not worry, my child! Near my hermitage, there is a hermitage of the wives of ascetics. They will take care of you without any problem. Calm down. Be happy."

With great relief, Sita followed the sage.

Handing over Sita to the wives of the ascetics, Valmiki said, "Remembering that she is the wife of a great king, take care of her." He went away to his hermitage.[486]

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Lakshmana returned home, told everything to Rama and consoled him.

"These four days I have not attended to public affairs. I feel sorry for this. See what sort of a fate a king has met with when he does not attend to the problems of the people", said Rama and he narrated the story of king Nrugu. "In the past, king Nrugu donated a crore cows to a crore Brahmins. One of those cows came back and joined the other cows in the cow shed. Unaware of this fact, that the king had donated that particular cow to another Brahmin, two Brahmins quarrelled about this cow and came to the king. The king did not give them an audience. The Brahmins got angry, cursed the king to become a chameleon, and gave away that cow to another Brahmin. (*How stupid they are! Instead of making the king a chameleon, they should have turned him into a cow and taken a cow each? Well, these Brahmins do not know any thing except anger and curses!*)

Nrugu came to know about the curse of the Brahmins. He got ditches dug for his convenience in all seasons during his form as a chameleon. He had fruit trees and flower trees planted around those ditches. He made arrangements for the food of a chameleon, handed over the kingdom to his son, told him sermons and become a chameleon.

(*Do curses of Brahmins act so late!*)

Narrating this story, Rama said, "I will tell you another story, listen!" and he started Nimi's story. (*How comfortable is life after abandoning the wife! Rama is living on telling story after story!*)

Nimi was a king. Once he wanted to make a sacrifice and asked Vasista to act as a Ritvik (a priest officiating the ritual of a sacrifice). Vasista said, "Indra called me first. I will go there first and come to you later. Wait!"

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486. Uttara kanda, sarga 59, slokas 21 to 24: Taking Sita to the wives of the ascetics, Valmiki said, "This is Sita. She is the wife of a good man Rama. You have to treat her with extreme care and with a sense of respect that she is the wife of a king…."

Consoling Sita Devi repeatedly, sage Valmiki returned to his hermitage."

Sita was pregnant. She was going to have a child soon. Therefore, the poet kept her in the hermitage of the wives of the ascetics. Why would all the wives of ascetics stay at one place?.... Perhaps, great sages too might have abandoned their wives like Sri Rama.

Sargas 60 & 61: Lakshmana crossed the Ganga and went back. He boarded the chariot after seeing from the other bank of the river that Valmiki had come and taken Sita with him. While Lakshmana was feeling sad, Sumantra who was driving the chariot told him the following: 'In the past, Asuras who were defeated at the hands of gods, sought refuge in the wife of sage Bhrugu. Vishnu came to know that she gave them assurance and so he slayed her. Then sage Bhrugu cursed Vishnu, "You will be born in the human world. You will be separated from your wife." Hence, Vishnu was born as Rama. He got separation from his wife due to that curse. I heard this when sage Durvasa told Dasaratha this story in the past. I am telling you this secret after such a long time. Do not worry. Whatever had to happen has happened." Sumantra consoled Lakshmana.

In the past stories (society), women seem to have done the same kind of acts, which men did. Asuras seeking refuge in a woman, that woman taking the responsibility of protecting them, a man becoming vengeful towards that woman — from these incidents we have to note that at one point of time men and women lived in an identical social condition.

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Nimi did not wait. He had the sacrifice performed by Gautama. Vasista returned, came to know about the sacrifice and wanted an audience with the king. Then the king was asleep. Vasista got angry (*should nobody sleep?*) and cursed that the king would remain without consciousness. The king woke up, came to know about the curse and cursed Vasista in the same way. Both of them left their bodies and turned into air. Vasista went to Brahma and asked him to give him a body. Brahma gave him an idea.

Once Varuna had sexually desired Urvasi and called her. Urvasi said, "I like you. But the Sun has called me first. Therefore, I have to go to him. I cannot come to you."

Varuna, suffering from pangs of desire, ejaculated his semen in a pot. (*My god! How many times do we have to hear these loathsome stories of gods!*)

Urvasi went to the sun. The sun angrily said, "I called you first. You had kept some one else in your mind. Take birth as a human being." He cursed her and also kept his semen in the same pot in which Varuna had kept his. From that pot, Agastya and Vasista were born. Thus, Vasista got a new body. Later, the Ikshvaku king appointed him as his caste priest.

Now, about the body of Nimi: Sages gave a boon to the life of Nimi. (*This boon is not for the body of Nimi!*) You will live in the eyes of living beings. With your help, all the beings will keep their eyes open and shut."

Sages gave this boon and put *Arani* on his body. (*Arani means 'fire'. It means, they burnt that body.*) From the body of Nimi, a man called Midhi emerged. He has two names. Janaka and Vaideha. (*This man is Sita's father!*) — Rama narrated this story up to this point and then started the story of Yayati to show how great patience is and how rarely it is found among people. (*Leaving Sita over there in the forests, the two brothers sat leisurely telling stories!*)

Yayati was a king. He had two wives. (*Alas! Only two? So few?*) Sarmishta and Devayani. Sarmishta's son was Uruvu. Devayani's son is Yaduvu. Yayati had more love for Sarmishta and her son. Yaduvu said to his mother, "The king does not like us. Let us die!"

Devayani told everything to her father Sukra. Sukra got angry with his son-in-law and cursed him, "You have hurt my daughter. You will become an old man!" (*Oh, what a nice father!*) Yayati heard about the curse of his father-in-law. He did not curse him in return. He bore it. He became old. He called Yaduvu and said, "You take my old age. My sexual desire is not yet fulfilled. After some time, I will take back my old age."

Yaduvu said angrily. "You have the son whom you like much. You have never been affectionate to me. You ask him."

Yayati called Uruvu and asked him.

Uruvu agreed happily.

The father became young. The son became an old man. Yayati enjoyed pleasures for some time and then took back his old age. He gave away his entire kingdom to Uruvu and cursed Yaduvu, "You are a wicked fellow. A Rakshasa will be born to you."

Have you noted, Lakshmana? Nimi cursed Vasista impatiently. But Yayati did not curse Sukra", Rama appreciated Yayati.

(*Well, why did Yayati curse Yaduvu? Should he not pardon him? Lakshmana! Why don't you ask? You have become an utterly foolish fellow after listening to your brother's stories!*)

He narrated stories that whole night, Rama began to rule the kingdom again from the next day onwards.

★ ★

Sri Rama Chandra ruled the kingdom as per Dharma — so that even a dog was not deprived of any thing.

One day as soon as he came to the assembly, Rama ordered, "Lakshmana! See if there are people who have come for some work with me?"

Lakshmana went out of the chamber and shouted, "Has any one come?"

None responded.

Lakshmana went to Rama and said, obediently, "No one has come, my Lord! All people in Rama's kingdom are comfortable and happy. There are no physical or mental diseases.

There are no premature deaths. The entire kingdom is swinging with milk and crops abundantly. What else can people wish for?"

It seems Rama had no faith in the comforts that Rama's rule gives. He said, "Go and look again! Owing to the fear of the king, people protect each other. The King's soldiers also protect people. Yet, go and look again."

Lakshmana went outside again. This time he saw a dog. "What do you want?" asked Lakshmana.

"I will submit to Rama alone. Ask Rama whether I can come inside or not. Gods were present in royal palaces and the houses of Brahmins. All gods were present with Rama. Rama was rich in all qualities. Ask him whether he will permit me or not", said the dog.[487]

Lakshmana went to Rama and asked. "As it has come for work, there is nothing wrong. Bring it", said Rama. The dog came in and barked, seeing Rama.

"What is your problem? Tell me without fear", said Rama.

"O king! The king protects as well as punishes living beings. The king ought to practise *Dharma* (Justice). You are noble. A man of good vows. You are *Paramadharma*", the dog sang about the qualities of Rama for a while and said, "A beggar called Sarvarthasiddhi beat me without any reason". The dog looked as if it asked Rama to ask the beggar about it.

Immediately the king's soldiers went and brought Sarvarthasiddhi.

Rama asked Sarvarthasiddhi angrily, "You have beaten this dog, it says. Why? Anger is an utter enemy of human beings. Human beings ought to control their senses. Sword, snake and fire do not do harm, which a wicked mind does to the human being. Tell me why have you beaten this dog?"

Sarvarthasiddhi was a very poor Brahmin. He lived on alms. He felt very embarrassed at the words of the king. "Your Excellency! It is true that I beat that dog. I was roaming about for alms. I did not get alms for a very long time. I was dying of hunger. I still roamed about for alms. At one place, this dog stood in my way. I warned it to make way for me. It moved a little bit but it still stood as an obstacle. I got angry and hit it. Your Excellency! I did a wrong thing", said the beggar.[488]

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487. Changing the myth of 'dog speaking' into reality, we have to understand that a person came to the king and spoke to him. ★

488. Uttara kanda, sarga 71, slokas 27 to 30: Sarvarthasiddhi's words: "While I was roaming for alms (*the poet said 'bhikshartham'*) and when I was angry in search of alms, I hit it once. When this dog was in my way, I asked it to move aside. It rose up and still stood as an obstacle at a spot. As I was provoked by anger and hunger, I hit it once, O king! Punish me for this!"

Aha! A hungry beggar in Rama's kingdom! He is roaming around every house and begging for alms. He was not getting alms. Angry, unable to withstand hunger!

There were beggars in Rama's kingdom. The fact that alms were not available however much one roamed — implies that people were not in a position to give alms!

It is not possible to argue that all the Brahmins in Rama's kingdom were happy. Sarvarthasiddhi was also a Brahmin. But, a very poor beggar. Unable to get alms, he was starving for food.

Did Sarvarthasiddhi hit the dog unjustifiably? Why did the dog stand in the way? Though he asked it to move aside, why did it move just a little and again come in his way? While walking along the path, was the dog in Rama Rajya not expected to behave in such a manner that it should not cause inconvenience to another living being?

Sarvarthasiddhi knows that it was not his fault. On the one hand, he was putting forward an argument in his defence. Yet, he admitted his mistake. ★

Rama looked at the entire assembly. "This man has admitted his offence. Think well and tell me what punishment should be given to him?"

Bhrugu, Angirasa, Vasista, Kasyapa and other ministers, scholars well versed in the duties of a king — Everybody thought seriously and began to eulogize Rama. "Your Excellency! You are the head of three worlds. You are a man of justice. You command every one...."

The dog lost its patience and said, "Your Excellency! I will tell you what punishment should be given to this offender. Appoint him as an official of temples."

Rama agreed immediately and sent Sarvarthasiddhi to that job on an elephant.

Rama's ministers asked, "Appointing a Brahmin as head of the temple will be a boon. How can it be a punishment?"

As Rama is not aware how it can be a punishment, he asked the dog, "Tell me why you asked me to do so."

"In the previous birth I was a head of a temple. I followed Dharma faithfully. Yet, I got this terrible birth. Do I need to say anything about this Brahmin who is short tempered? With his cruelty and stupidity, he will earn sin that is enough for seven births. To throw some one into hell, appoint him as an official on god's money or Brahmin's money. That man will surely commit mistakes. However small a sin he may commit he will fall into hell. I did not make any mistake. Yet I got this birth", said the dog.

On hearing the dog's words, Rama wondered, "Ah! What knowledge this dog has!"

Later the dog went to Kasi and starved to death wilfully (*praayoopaveesam*). **489**

In this manner, all people were extremely happy about the rule of the justice of Sri Rama.

★ ★

In a dense forest, an owl built a nest on a tree.

An eagle forcibly occupied that nest.

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489. Uttara kanda, sarga 71, slokas 39 to 42:

The beggar gave the reason why he had hit the dog. What, then, should a king do? He should ask the dog — 'why did you stand in the way of all people?' However, Rama did not ask the dog like that . Moreover, he gave power to punish the beggar to the dog!

".....The dog submitted to Rama to give him (the beggar) power over temples. Having heard these words, Rama gave him (Sarvarthasiddhi) and sent him on an elephant. (*Without understanding what sort of punishment it was!*) Rama's ministers asked smilingly, 'This seems to be a boon and not a curse'. Then Rama said to the ministers as follows: "You are not aware of the secrets of the scriptures. As this dog knows the reason, I asked this dog why it has imposed this punishment....." (*You know what the dog had said.*)

The ministers who run Rama's administration are ignorant of scriptures while the dog possessed the scriptural knowledge. How beautiful is Rama's rule!

When two persons quarrel and come for justice, Rama did not decide! He would do as per the wish of the second person! That was Rama's justice!

Any way, the poor Sarvarthasiddhi got a position to live comfortably. He will be comfortable as long as lives.

It is the anxiety of the poet to say, "Under Rama's rule, even a dog got justice". However, the poet does not have the thought that the reputation of Rama's rule will vanish by saying that there were beggars who were starving. The poet does not think that a 'kingdom without beggars is great'. As the existence of beggars is natural, it is the poet's opinion that Rama's kingdom is great even though there are beggars.

★

The owl and the eagle quarrelled and came to Sri Rama Chandra for justice. Sri Rama called Pushpaka and went to that nest in the forest. (*The Airplane is readily available at hand! It comes as soon it is called!*)

"When did you build this nest?" Rama asked the eagle.

"This nest is mine since the emergence of human beings on the earth."

"The nest is mine since the emergence of trees on this earth."

Rama asked the ministers to think about whose was justice. (*Is Rama ministers to think?*)

The ministers praised Rama. Rama began. "All right! I will tell you something from the Puranas." (*Does ruling the kingdom mean telling Puranic stories?*) "In the past all the worlds were one and the same. Then, the goddess of earth entered the womb of Vishnu. Then Vishnu slept in the sea for a very long time. Then Brahma was born from the navel of Vishnu. Then Brahma created the earth. Later he created trees on the earth. The owl is saying that the nest belongs to it since the emergence of trees. Therefore, the nest belongs to the owl and not the eagle. So, we have to punish the eagle." Rama concluded.

Immediately, *Akasavani* (voice of the sky) said to Rama, "This eagle took this birth due to a curse. Relieve him of the curse!"

Rama touched the eagle.

The eagle at once changed into a divine man with garlands of flowers and that man went into the sky. **490**

While Rama was relieving even worms and insects from the curses and ruling dogs, foxes, crows and eagles with mercy and justice, one day an aged Brahmin from a village came to Rama grieving. "O king! My son died prematurely. I have never spoken lies. Not done any sin. Why have I got this punishment? What is this tragedy in Rama's kingdom? O king! Owing to a kings' fault people meet with untimely death. I face this grief due to your negligence", he blamed Rama. (*We do not know who this gentleman is, he is a very bold man!*)

Rama was upset by the accusation of the Brahmin. "Is a Brahmin boy dead in my kingdom? Sage Vasista! Can't you think about the reason?", he looked at all Brahmins curiously.

Vasista, Vasudeva, Jabali, Gautama, Narada and all other Brahmins held moral discussions. Finally, Narada said the actual and great reason. "O king! In the past only Brahmins used to do penance. Then Justice walked on its four feet. Later, Kshatriyas also began to do penance. Then some amount of injustice entered. Now in your kingdom a terrible unjust activity is going on. A sudra by name Sambuka is doing penance. As a result of it there was this untimely death in your kingdom!"

"What? Is a Sudra doing penance in Rama's kingdom?". Rama rose up furiously.

"O king! Owing to the fault of the king this tragedy has occurred." **491**

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490. It seems there are only dogs, foxes, eagles and cats in Rama's kingdom. Human beings and their problems do not strike the poet.

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491. Uttara kanda, sarga 86, slokas 15; sarga 87, sloka 4: The old Brahmin said, "Owing to the offences of the kings, people become victims of injustice and met untimely death!"

Is this premature death to all? Or only to Brahmins?

Among the Brahmins whom Rama called for discussing justice, Narada was also present. There was an argument that Narada was not a Brahmin but a Devamuni. It was Narada, who suggested the death penalty, and Brahmins had nothing to do with it. However, the poet had clearly mentioned Narada as a Brahmin.

When asked to tell the reason for the death of a Brahmin boy, all the moralists debated and said, "A Sudra is doing penance".

★

"Will Sri Rama — who has studied all scriptures and morals — commit a fault?.... It is not the fault of the king. He is alive because the life span of that wicked fellow is not over." Said Rama and started immediately, searching in all directions.

In the South, on a big hill, on the bank of a beautiful lake, in front of a small cottage, under the shadow of a tree, sage Sambuka sat in meditation.

Rama — who goes into ecstasy with fear and respect as soon as he sees sages — got uncontrollable anger when he saw that Sudra sage sitting quietly on the sacred grass. "O old man! Stop meditation! The head of Kosala, Sri Rama Chandra is commanding you. Who are you? Submit all your details." Rama asked with a roar.

Sambuka calmly opened his eyes and expressed happiness in his skeleton like face. "Welcome king! You have kindly visited my cottage. You have made me happy….. Relax on this seat. Accept my hospitality….", he invited the king very softly.

"Old man! Do not talk unnecessarily. You are going to receive my hospitality. What is your name?"

"Sambuka, my lord!"

"With what wish are you doing this penance? Heaven? Salvation?"

"The *Sanatan* sages are my guides. With whatever wish they did penance, I too…."

"Some do it for gaining heaven, some for salvation, some for riches and wealth, some…."

"I do not desire riches in this world. I am doing penance for the sake of divinity."

"Are you a Brahmin? Kshatriya? What is your caste? Tell me the truth."

"I have never known falsehood. I am a Sudra, O king!"

"Penance for a Sudra? Base fellow! Do you expect equality with Brahmins and Kshatriyas?"

"I believe that all human beings are equal in worshipping the god"

"Are you so independent? Are human beings equal before god? Never. Among human beings, Sudras are the lowest. They are base people who ought to live by serving the upper Varnas (castes). If all Sudras defy the oldest tradition and expect a life of penance, who will serve the upper castes?"

"If all the Sudras attain this otherworldly knowledge, what will they have to do with worldly duties? Who are Brahmins? Who are Sudras?"

"Fool! All your attempts will go waste. All scriptures declare loudly that there is no place for a Sudra in the worlds."

"What is the sin of the Sudras, my lord?"

"To be born a Sudra!"

"I cannot agree"

"Why? Not agreeing with the scriptures and not accepting them without any doubt, do you dare to argue and question them?"

"O king! Will a Sudra himself accept without question the scriptures that debase, insult and harm a Sudra?"

"Don't argue, you fool! Don't you know that a Sudra is not qualified to do penance? Your vile acts harm the world!"

"O king! Owing to me — who live meditating by myself in this corner of this dense forest – how will the worlds be harmed?" Sambuka smiled.

Sri Rama became furious. "As a result of your sin, the Brahmin boy has died. If this vile act continues, where is the protection for the high castes in Rama's kingdom? Today you are alone. Tomorrow, will you not become a guide to all Sudras? Will the disciples who believe you not propagate your beliefs? Should such undesirable things happen in Rama's kingdom? Don't you know that Sri Rama will protect the caste system by expending all his energies?

Sudra! You dare to defy god… defy the king… defy scriptures… finally your defiance of your own life…. your daring is unpardonable. Face the punishment for your offence" saying so, Sri Rama Chandra, who was born to establish a just rule, took out the sword fiercely and cut off the head of Sambuka with one stroke.

That old trunk fell down and the Sudra blood filled the earth.

Rama's kingdom was purified!

"Lives of the Brahmins were fulfilled.[492]

★ ★

Completing the act of justice Rama went to the nearby hermitage of Agastya.

Agastya praised Rama with extreme joy. "Rama! A while ago, I heard that you defended dharma (Justice) by killing the Sudra sage. I am very happy. Meanwhile, you have arrived. The daring of that Sudra has exceeded all limits. Fool. He invited harm to his life. He says, it is not necessary to observe principles of caste. My disciples used to carry all the prattling of those Sudra disciples. Unable to hear them, I used to shut my ears. So far, I was upset how this terrible thing could happen in Rama's kingdom. Now, you have opened your eyes, undertook the act of justice and come to my hermitage. My hermitage is blessed with your arrival. A king like you alone is the saviour of the world. The king himself is the ruler of Dharma. The king is born with an element of god. Rama! If people see you for a moment, they get rid of all sins. They attain holy worlds. Those who view you from a negative perspective will face blows from Yama's staff. If they memorise your name, it is enough and they attain salvation. You alone are the refuge for all the worlds!" Praising Rama with a thousand voices, Agastya extended hospitality.

Hearing the eulogy of sages that his act was

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492. Uttara kanda, sarga 88, slokas 16 to 19; sarga 89, slokas up to 6: Rama is asking Sambuka. "O Old performer of penances! In which vagina (*yoonyaam*) were you born?... I am Rama, son of Dasaratha…. What do you desire? Heaven? Then what else?.... If you are a Brahmin, you will benefit. Are you a Kshatriya? Vysya? Sudra? Speak the truth"

Sambuka's reply: "Sri Rama! I was born from a Sudra's vagina. I desire heaven along with the body. I will not speak lies. Know that I am a Sudra!"

While that Sudra was speaking so, Raghava (Rama) took out a dazzling sword from his sheath and chopped off the head of that Sudra."

Then all gods praised Rama.

Drums were beaten. A rain of flowers showered on him. In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Rama did not argue with Sambuka. As soon as he heard the word 'Sudra', he chopped off Sambuka's head and protected Dharma (justice). The fact that Sambuka was a Sudra and being aware of the rule that one should not violate rules of the caste system in Rama's kingdom -- undertook an activity for which only Brahmin and Kshatriyas alone are qualified implies that he undertook it with a view to defy the rules of caste system. Without fearing the punishment of the king, Sambuka demanded a right, which his caste did not have.

As soon as Rama slayed Sambuka, the gods praised Rama, (**Uttara kanda, sarga 89, sloka 8**): "Raghunandana! Because of you, this Sudra will not attain heaven." (*This means, this Sudra was trying to go to heaven by doing penance. Now because of you the danger of this fellow going to heaven is averted. Therefore, the poet has concluded that it is an utter lie that those who die saying the words of Rama will go to heaven!*)

Gods praised Rama and asked him, "Take whatever boon you want". (*For killing a Sudra!*)

"Make the Brahmin boy alive. I gave the word to make him alive", said Rama.

As Sambuka's head was chopped off, the boy got up at once. He was happy. Later the gods talked among themselves, "Sage Agastya got up after having stayed on the bed of water. Let us see him" and they left. (*Agastya had lain down in water for twelve years, they say! Yes, one must see such a person — how rotten, how mossy and how infested he is with itch!*) ★

justified, Rama felt more joy.

Next day, while Rama was leaving, Agastya said, "You need not have any fear in this area. Go carefully. Go without fear. Agastya gave courage to the ruler of the world and saw him off.[493]

★ ★

Once some sages came to Rama and requested him. "Rama! We have heard that you killed Ravanasura and we felt very happy about that. Now we have trouble due to Lavanasura. He was born to Kumbhinasi and Madhuvu. A most cruel fellow! You alone have to rescue us from his menace."

Looking at his brothers, Rama asked, "Who will kill Lavanasura?"

Satrughna said he would go. (*Now Satrughna is needed!*)

Rama felt happy and at once got Satrughna crowned so that Lavanasura's kingdom could belong to Satrughna.

Satrughna started off for a battle with a huge army.

On his way, he stopped at Valmiki's hermitage.

At the same night, Sita gave birth to twins. Both were sons. To prevent evil influences on the children, Valmiki tied some threads and named them 'Kusa' and 'Lava'. He did all that ritual with the names of Rama's gotra (lineage).

Satrughna heard every thing.

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493. Uttara kanda, 6 sargas, from 89 to 94: By the time Rama reached, Agastya got up from his twelve-year sleep in water. Agastya was about to give Rama an ornament. Rama said, "The king ought to give ornaments to others, he ought not to receive them."

Agastya said, "In the past people did not have the king in 'Krita yuga'. (*This relates to a period in which there was no ruler in human society*). People asked Brahma for a king. Taking some element each from all the gods, he created the king. Since the king was born with the element of god, you can take this."

"How did you get this?" asked Rama.

Agastya narrated the story of Sveta.

Sveta was a king. He did penance and went to Brahma's world. Even there, he felt hungry.

"People don't feel hungry in Brahma's world. Why I am feeling hungry here?" he asked Brahma. (*Sveta! It means it is not Brahma's world. It is a world where we feel very hungry!*)

Brahma said, "As long as you have performed penance, you did not work hard, you did not sow any seed, you did not give even a fistful of alms to the beggar and you did penance protecting your body well. That is why you have this pain for hunger. Live, eating your own corpse. After some time, Agastya will elevate you!"

Since then, Sveta used to come from the sky in an airplane, eat his dead body in the lake completely and leave. The dead body used to be ready again for the next day. After this had happened for some time, Agastya came to this forest. Sveta asked Agastya to remove his pain for hunger. Agastya gave an ornament. As soon as he took that ornament, Sveta got rid of his hunger. This is that ornament." (Agastya himself says, 'Agastya came, Agastya gave!')

Later, he narrated another story. "Danda was a king. His priest was Sukracharya. Once Danda saw Araja, the eldest daughter of Sukra, desired her sexually and asked her. Arasa told him to ask her father. Without heeding her advice, he molested her. Sukra heard about it and cursed him, "Dust and rain will become one and Danda's kingdom should be destroyed." All people left Danda's kingdom. Sukra scolded his daughter and left leaving his daughter in the hermitage itself. Later, dust and rain fell and Danda's kingdom became Dandakaranya.

Rama heard these stories and left for Ayodhya.

★

He talked to his sister-in-law and enquired about her well-being.

Shedding tears, Sita asked, "Is your brother well, my child!"

Satrughna told her everything. The next day, he left for the battle.[494]

Satrughna reached Madhupura, killed Lavanasura, occupied that kingdom, stayed there for twelve years and started back for his elder brother.

On his way, he stopped at Valmiki's hermitage again.

That night he heard two boys singing Rama's story.[495]

Later he went to Ayodhya, stayed there for some time and went back to his kingdom.

★ ★

Rama began arrangements for the Aswamedha sacrifice.

Telling Lakshmana how good the Aswamedha sacrifice is, Ravana narrated Indra's story. "At one time, Indra had killed a Rakshasa called Vruttasura. As that Rakshasa was good, Indra got that sin. Indra fainted. After Brahma performed the Aswamedha sacrifice, Indra recovered. As it is so fruitful, do that

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494. Uttara kanda, sargas 78 & 79:

In Valmiki's original, the episode of Lavanasura comes before the episode of Sambuka.

As I thought of presenting all incidents connected with Rama's rule at one place, I have mentioned Sambuka's episode first.

While going to the battle, at night when he was staying in Valmiki's hermitage, Satrughna asked Valmiki, "There are some signs of sacrifice over there. Whose hermitage used to be there?"

Valmiki narrated a story. (*My god, another some trash story!*)

A king called Mitrasaha engaged Vasista as an officiating priest and started the *Aswamedha* sacrifice. As that king had killed a Rakshasa in his past birth, the friend of that Rakshasa developed vengeance against this king and came in the guise of Vasista on the last day of the sacrifice. He asked, "O king! Serve me a meal with meat!" The king agreed and asked his cook to cook meat. The same Rakshasa slipped into the kitchen and kept human flesh ready for the meal. (*perhaps he killed the cook!*)

Then the real Vasista came for the meal. The Rakshasa served him food in the guise of a cook. Vasista got wild and cursed the king, "Do you serve human flesh to me? Human flesh will be your food." The king also got angry and took water into his hands to curse Vasista. The King's wife dissuaded her husband. Water in the hands of the king fell on his feet. His feet turned dark. He became *Kalmashapada* (one with black feet) and faced the curse for some time. Those are signs of the sacrifice which he had performed", said Valmiki.

The same night Sita gave birth to twins. Satrughna knew about it. He also talked to Sita. ★

495. Uttara kanda, sarga 84, slokas 21 to 23:

Satrughna heard Kusa and Lava singing Rama's story. "How melodiously they are singing? Who are these children?" he thought. But he did not ask Valmiki. "Many wonders take place in the hermitages of sages. We should not be inquisitive", he thought. He thinks 'it is wrong to ask who were singing Rama's story." He left without asking about it.

If Satrughna had come to know of Kusa and Lava, Rama will also come to know about them. Therefore, the story requires that Rama not know about them yet. Because, later, when Rama performs the Aswamedha sacrifice, he will have to ask Kusa and Lava to sing at the *yagna* without knowing who they are. As the story should proceed in this manner, it is the poet's opinion that Satrughna should not discover the identity of Kusa and Lava. Then the story should proceed as if Satrughna did not know about the birth of Kusa and Lava. ★

sacrifice", said Lakshmana to Rama.

This time Rama narrated Ila's story to show how great this sacrifice was. "He was a king. Once he went about hunting and changed into a woman. In the same area, Siva was sauntering in the guise of a woman along with Parvati. Ila prayed to Parvati to make him a man again.

"Be like a woman for one month and be like a man for another month", said Parvati.

Ila reached a lake. There a sage, called Buddha saw Ila, sexually desired her and spent one whole month with her. The following month Ila turned into a male. Thus in nine months Ila gave birth to a child named Pururava. All the sages performed the Aswamedha sacrifice to keep Ila permanently as a male. Ila remained a male forever. Rama decided to perform such a miraculous sacrifice.

Sacrificial sheds were built on the bank of the river Gomati in Naimisa forest.

A statue of Sita was made with gold.[496]

Rama invited everybody — sages of different countries, subsidiaries, relatives and friends.

Vibhishana and Sugriva also came along with their ministers.

As soon as they arrived, they heard that Rama had abandoned Sita.

With anger at Rama, Sugriva said to Vibhishana, "He says he knows all Dharmas. He again suspected her and abandoned his wife, have you heard?"

"Public opinion…."

"Hell with public opinion! All that is superficial talk. Does any king care for public opinion? Do you care? Do I care? We impose the death penalty on people for no reason, don't we? Who does not know the farce of this public opinion? In fact, he himself had had a suspicion. Your brother should have said before he died! — that he had not touched Sita! At least your wife knows all the facts, doesn't she? Why don't you make her tell Rama?"

"Even if he knew the truth, can a man born in a family of pride, accept his wife who was with another man? Of course, we can't speak for people like you…."

Sugriva got angry. "If he had had that pride why didn't he abandon her then itself? Why did he bring her home and get children? Though you abhor us, who does not know about your pride?" Sugriva waved his hands carelessly and turned his face away.

Meanwhile, Hanuman came hurriedly. "Do you know what a terrible thing has happened?" He narrated every thing to Sugriva and lamented. "If this is what has happened, why should I search in all places with so much effort – *wearing down my feet*?

"Not only that! Why should we risk our life and fight the battle. Did he wage the battle for the sake of Sita? It is foolishness to think so", said Sugriva.

"Your Excellency! Why don't you tell Ramayya to bring back Sitamma?"

"You tell him. If he scolds you, let him scold you. It will not look nice if he scolds me. Any way I am the king, aren't I?"

Hanuman looked for an appropriate moment when Rama was alone, went near him, and began conversing.

"Lord! Mother Sitamma….."

"Talk of other things! Are all your wives well? Do you have only those sixteen whom Bharata gave you? Or have you married any more?"

Hanuman felt slightly shy and said, "Though Bharata gave me stars-like girls, I am afraid that they may unanimously decide to abandon me."

"Why? Why will they leave you?"

"As soon as they look at me, they laugh. They ridicule me. I keep quiet because they are beautiful girls. However, I have no hope. They will not stay any longer with me."

"Do devoted wives leave their husbands?"

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496. Uttara kanda, sarga 91, sloka 25: Asking Lakshmana to make arrangements for a sacrifice, Rama says, "Get a gold statue of my life" (*kaanchaniim mama paniim*). If Rama had wives other than Sita, he would have had another wife to sit beside him, wouldn't he? ★

"We do not have such a practice in our place, Ramayya!"

"Well if your wives leave and flee to this country, I will get them hanged."

"Nay, it is a crazy act. Hand them over to me again"

"All right! I will do as you wish. You have helped me a lot…."

Hanuman raised the topic of Sita"

"…..Ramayya! You have abandoned… mother Sitamma. It is unfair, my lord! You are a great man who knows what justice is and what injustice is."

"Hanuman!...."

"Yes! My Lord!"

"Do you think I have done injustice?"

"Not injustice…. but it is injustice my lord!"

"But, another man….."

"That fellow had already passed away, Ramayya!"

"When he was alive…. then…. Tell me what actually happened in Lanka."

Hanuman narrated the whole thing again. That wicked fellow…. however much he threatened her, lured her, Sita…. without yielding to that fellow…. stopped sleeping and eating…. *wailed continuously from the eyes dropping tears on earth*…in Asoka vana….."

Rama was lost in thoughts.

Two boys in ascetic attire were singing songs about the king near the sacrificial shed. While those young voices accompanied by suitable instruments were singing melodiously, all the people gathered around those singers.

The birth of Sri Rama, his youth, his marriage to Sita, his father's attempts to crown him, his step-mother's jealousy, Sri Rama Chandra's exile to the forest…. the story went on like this.

More than the story, that music and the acting of those children appealed to the people.

Rama called those singers.

"Whose sons are you?"

"Disciples of Valmiki"

"Who composed this whole song? How did they gather all these details?"

"Our teacher knows every thing. He himself composed it"

"Where is your teacher?"

"He is in this sacrificial shed"

The children began singing again. While Sri Ramachandra was living in Chitrakuta and facing hardships, Bharata came and asked his brother to come back to Ayodhya…. Sri Ramachandra, who is the obedient follower of the command of his father, rejected Bharata's request and sent him away, giving him his sandals. Again, Sri Rama wandered around the forests for several years and finally settled in Panchavati. While he was there, one day, jealous Surpanakha…." Listening to the song, Rama was lost in thoughts.

He realised that these singing boys… disciples of Valmiki…. are Sita's sons.[497]

Is it justified to accept Sita again? Is Sita innocent?

"Lakshmana!"

"My lord!"

"Call sage Valmiki"

Valmiki came immediately in response to the king's call.

"O great sage! If Sita were a devoted wife and if she is innocent will she swear in the full assembly?"

"Rama! Why will she not do it if you want? Does Sita not know that she has to follow the

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497. Uttara kanda, sarga 108, sloka 2: "After Kusa and Lava finished singing the history of Rama, realised that the two singers were Sita Devi's sons…."

Only then, Rama understood that Kusa and Lava were his sons.

Now, Kusa and Lava sang up to 'Yuddha kanda' only. Telling about *Ramayana* to Rama, Kusa and Lava said, "Apart from *Uttara kanda*, it has six kandas." (**Uttara kanda, sarga 107, sloka 27**). Kusa and Lava stopped the horses, which Rama released while doing Aswamedha sacrifice is not there in Valmiki original.

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wish of her husband?"

"Sita must swear that she is a chaste woman. She has to instil confidence in everybody in the assembly. Only then, will I accept her. In Rama's view, there is not one justice for his own people and another for outsiders."

"Rama! After so long you are being merciful. Sita will surely create confidence that she is a chaste and devoted wife!" Valmiki accepted.[498]

"Sita Devi has to prove that she is chaste in front of all people. If she does so Rama will accept her."

"He did not ask her to prove it but she has to create confidence in all people. Yesterday, I heard this with my own ears."

"Of course! But, how will she create confidence? Rama's intention is that she ought to do some thing. Will he believe if she simply swears?"

"Why doesn't he believe her? The other day my co-brother (wife's sister's husband) bluffed that he had returned the beam of a yoke which he had borrowed. Moreover, he swore in the name of his wife as if his wife was dead if contrary happened. What could we do — except believe him?

"Why talk about your experience.... Rama will not believe her if she simply swears!"

"Then, how will she prove it?"

"I don't know! She will have to do something or the other. They say she is a *great* devoted wife. Can't she do this much?"

"Look! You claim you are a great devotee? Can you prove it? We will throw you into a fire pit. Can you come out?"

"Well, I am stupid! What sort of a devotee am I?"

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498. Uttara kanda, sarga 108, slokas 4 & 6: While sending messengers to Valmiki, Rama said, "If Sita has pure character and she is faultless, she can purify herself after taking sage Valmiki's consent. To demonstrate her chastity and devotion to her husband let her swear (*sapadhaha = oath*) before this assembly and me tomorrow morning.

'Let her purify herself', 'Let her swear!' what do these expressions mean?

What does Rama expect Sita to do?

Should she swear orally thus, "I am a devoted wife. I am chaste. I swear?" Or should she demonstrate a miracle?

If we observe Rama's words to his messengers, this is not clear.

After bringing Sita into the assembly, Valmiki said to Rama, (**Uttara kanda, sarga 109, sloka 17**): "Now, Sita will create confidence in you."

Then, Rama said to Valmiki. (**Uttara kanda, sarga 110, sloka 3**): "In the past, Sita had sworn in the presence of gods and hence I brought her home. Now, if it is evident in the presence of people that Sita is chaste, love emerges from me."

In what manner did Sita create confidence in Lanka? She jumped into the fire and came out of it. Only when she demonstrated a miracle Rama had confidence in her purity. Now, if she has to create confidence in Rama and the assembly once again, she has to do something, miraculous again.

When Rama said, "Let Sita prove her chastity and swear", it does not mean that she has to swear orally. It meant that she has to show some miracle!"

Accordingly, Sita calls the goddess of earth and shows her miracle.

However, while we understand this scene from a realistic perspective, we don't think that Sita called the goddess of earth.

Where as people, either innocently or foolishly believe in miracles, it is natural that they expect that 'Sita might show a miracle and Rama may believe her if she performs a miracle'. ★

"Then think that all are like you. People may be good but how can they perform miracles if they are asked to?

"Well, what does he want her to prove?"

"Did he ask her to prove?"

"They say, he has asked her to prove her chastity!"

"May be we have to get Ravana and make him speak!"

"It doesn't matter if she doesn't have such a crazy husband. What are these tests? What does he want her do?" Women exclaimed in wonder by pressing their cheeks."

"Will he accept her after such a long time? Shameless fellow!...She will live with the sage as she has lived so far"

"Alas! Don't say that! Why such daring to a woman? At least after all these years, that great man is showing mercy. That is very great."

"Well, then, why couldn't he have said the same thing then? Why did he abandon her without asking her, "People suspect you. Will you prove that you are a chaste and a devoted wife?"

"He is using the people as a pretext. In fact it is *a ghost in his heart*. He is utterly suspicious"

Important people who have gathered around Rama were eulogizing Rama's kingdom in a thousand voices. They were talking so loudly that the king could hear them very clearly. "Have you seen such a man of justice anywhere? Has any king made his wife stand before justice in front of all people? As is our good fortune, we are in Rama's kingdom and hence we are able to see this pious man with our own eyes.... otherwise..."

"For Sri Ramachandra all are equal whether they are his own people or others. The same justice for all, the same Dharma for all."[499]

People continued coming in large crowds.

"Is it over?"

"Not yet. Mother Sitamma has not yet arrived."

"What is this proving business? How can she prove?" — New comers.

"I don't know! A *great* devoted wife. She can do any thing"

"It would be nice if she really shows some proof and makes this wicked fellow feel ashamed in front of all the people."

"Why will he feel ashamed? He will feel proud thus, 'See what a great chaste woman my wife is; she does not know any one else except me!"

"Well said. Did I tell you about my fourth brother-in-law? He excels Rama. Every ten days, he chases his wife out of the house accusing, "You have looked at this fellow, you have looked at that fellow.' When she runs towards a well or a ditch, others interfere and persuade him. He somehow accepts her. Although he allows his wife to come into the house, he continues to murmur like a gadfly. He *murmurs and murmurs*, and drives her away from the house on some pretext or the other. Believe me, he does not allow her to stay in the house even for ten days at a stretch"!

"You should have kicked that *son of an ass*!"

"We too thought doing the same. However, would that girl allow us? She cried, "If you do anything to my husband, I will jump into a well and die". Then we kept quiet leaving her to her fate saying, "All right. Die at your husband's place!"

"When you talk of death I remember one thing. The other day Rajamma's daughter jumped into the well and died, do you know? A man came from her village!"

"Why?"

"What other reason can be there? The same problem. That useless, undeserving husband...."

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499. Uttara kanda, sarga 108, slokas 14 & 15:

Sages felt happy for Rama said that Sita must swear in the assembly. "On hearing the words of Rama, the great warrior, all the sages shouted loudly, 'Good! Good!' They said, "O Raghava! This is appropriate for you. We don't see this kind of justice anywhere." ★

People pushed each other tumultuously.

Sita came with a lowered head behind Valmiki.

With saffron clothes, she was like a female sage. She had covered herself with a veil around the shoulders.

She came in front of Rama and stood, her head bent low.

In a tone of Persuasion, Valmiki began calmly. "Your Excellency! Your wife is a *great* devoted wife. Those who say that she has committed sin will go to *Raura* and other hells. As Sita is faultless, I kept her in my hermitage. Kusa and Lava are your sons. Rama! Accept this unfortunate woman and make all of us happy."

Then he cautioned Sita, "My child! Your husband is your god! Seek refuge in your husband, my child!"

Shedding tears profusely and with a trembling body, Sita tried to raise her tearful eyes. She folded her hands in front of her husband. "My lord! I always seek refuge in you. I am a devoted wife. I have heard stories of devoted wives since my childhood. I heard about the duties of women in Vedic lessons. I dreamt of leading my life with chastity and devotion to my husband. Every moment, I have kept my soul and body for you. I believed you as my god and have faced any number of hardships as joy. I have not yielded to any hope or desire even in imagination or dream, I believed the worship of your feet is my duty. When you rejected me in Lanka., I thought this life was useless for me.

My lord! Then you kindly accepted me. I felt happy that I would live my whole life, serving at your feet. But my misfortune did not leave me. I might have separated some couple in some past birth. You rejected me and left me in the forests mercilessly, not even considering that I was pregnant.

All these years, sage Valmiki has protected me and my children with great affection *by keeping us in his stomach*. Now, the sage has brought me here again saying, 'your husband will accept you'! He is asking me to swear that I am a chaste woman……." Sita raised her face wet with grief and looked at Rama. She looked at him sharply and plaintively as if both of them were alone. "Foolish fellow! Don't you know my chastity? Have you not been aware of my good qualities since my youth? If I swear that I am a chaste woman, will it create confidence in you? Is all our long time companionship of no value?" said Sita's looks.

Rama's eyes could not stay on Sita's face long and he looked down.

Sita was anxious to tell in a loud voice to the Sun, the moon, the Horizons and gods that she was chaste.

She folded her hands before her husband who is the direct incarnation of all gods. "My lord! I have always been a devoted wife. A chaste woman. Always the servant at your feet. I have never desired any other man. I have never let my mind stray to another man.

My husband alone is my god. My life. My husband alone is my all.

With the rejection of my husband, all my energy is sapped. Now I have no desire to live.

I came here in an attempt to give up my life at your feet.

I have stood as a culprit in front of so many people. I am dying of shame. All my hopes to live are vanishing." Sita's voice choked while she spoke.

Trying to speak *further and further* with great difficulty, her eyes closed, she lost consciousness, fell down to the ground and lay lifeless.

"Sita has fallen down! Sita has fallen down!" There was tumult among people.

The news of Sita's death spread and people were drowned in the *sea of sorrow*. "Alas! What a terrible thing has happened!", rural illiterate folk cried aloud. Women, men, young and everybody gathered in groups and are crying.

"Finally, is this the fate of mother Sita!"

"Rama alone has taken Sita's life"

"It's wrong. What are you saying?"

"How has she died?"

"Has she swallowed something and taken her life? How depressed she must have been!"

"She passed away, proving that she is a very devoted wife. What will Rama say now?"

"He asked her to show proof. She has shown him a good proof"

"Rama fell down. He fainted out of grief….."

All big people and great people gathered around him and consoled Rama. They asked him to bear the grief.

Unable to bear it, Rama kept fainting.

Recovering very soon every time.

"Alas! My Sita!..... My half body!…. My dutiful wife…. I too will die. Leave me! I cannot live even for a moment without Sita. I will stay wherever my Sita is. I will live with my dutiful wife….." Rama wailed as per scriptures and tradition.

"Rama! Do not grieve. Sita's time was over and she has left comfortably. When the duration of your life is over, you will meet Sita in heaven. This is god's decision." Aged people consoled him.

Unable to control his grief. Rama is still wailing out of love for his wife. "Sita! My beloved!" **500**

Four or five subsidiary kings gathered at a corner and thought. "Will it look nice if we ask him now?"

These four kings had daughters of a 'marriageable age'. They were unable to

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500. Uttara kanda, sarga 110, slokas 13 to 21: See what sort of miracle Sita showed! "All people who came from all countries…. waited eagerly to see what would happen now."

Sita, who wore saffron garments looked at all those who had come to the assembly, folded her hands, bowed her head, and said with downward looks. 'I have not thought of any man other than Rama even in my mind. To me, who is the wife of Vishnu, let *Bhuudeevi*, the goddess of earth give me a place if I have worshipped only Rama…. If my words that I do not know any man other than Rama are true, let Goddess Earth take me away!"

When Sita swore like that, a divine throne rose up from the crest of the earth. Goddess Earth appeared, embraced Sita and sat her on that throne. While Sita was going into the nether world, rain of flowers fell from the sky."

In this manner, Sita went into the earth. She went away from Rama forever!

See how Rama shouts at the earth out of 'extreme love' for his wife (**sarga 111, slokas up to 16**). "Out of grief, Rama said: 'My heart is grieving so much as never before. While I was watching, Sita has disappeared. O Goddess Earth! Get my Sita back! If you do not give her back to me, you will see my anger, which will tell about me. Give my Sita to me! Or make way for me. I will live with Sita in either the nether world or heaven. If you do not give Sita, I will destroy you along with the mountains and forests. I will destroy the entire earth. I will make it full of water. (*Then will you board a boat? Where will you stay?*) Get my bow and arrows! Now itself I will find out what this earth thinks about me and break it."

While Sri Rama was upset with anger and grief, "Brahma accompanied by gods said to Rama: 'Rama! Do not grieve. You are the incarnation of Vishnu, aren't you? I am not so great that I have to remind you of this. If you think a while, you will realise it. Sita will reach the heaven. In heaven, you will meet Sita. This is true. (*Which means, this is false!*)"

Later Rama heard these words from the crest of the earth: "Rama! You will not find Sita here. She is in heaven." (*Perhaps, one has to go to heaven through the earth!*)

We have to understand the point that 'Sita went to heaven in the presence of Rama', as 'Sita died in front of Rama'.

To Rama who was wailing for Sita, Brahma said, "Listen to 'Uttara kanda' with a sense of fairness."

Next day, Kusa and Lava sang '*Uttara Ramayana*' also before Rama. (**Uttara kanda, sarga 112, sloka 2**).

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understand and worried, "Will he marry all the four? Only two? Or none?"

"If we do not propose, alliance will be out of our hands"

"An alliance with the emperor is good... but... he may harass our girls"

"The more they suffer at the hands of the husband, the better. Look at Sita Devi! What a reputation she attained! All shed tears. Is there any one who said she had committed a fault? Between you and me. If people say anything, they will blame Rama. Will they blame Sita? Whatever difficulties girls face, neither the parental family nor the husband's family is maligned. If Rama is willing, I will definitely give my daughter's hand to him."

"All right. Then you ask him."

Everybody went to Rama.

Rama was repeatedly fainting before the proposal for a second marriage *fell on his ears.*[501]

★ ★

Rama fully immersed himself in royal affairs.

He expanded the army and increased his treasury.

Daily, he is engaged in deep thoughts and discussions for the expansion of his kingdom.

The news that came from Kekaya kingdom made Rama extremely happy.

Yudhajit, the king of Kekaya sent a message to Rama through sage Gargya. "Gandharva country is very prosperous and wealthy. The river Sindhu flows in the middle of the country. You must conquer that country at any cost. Except for you, none can conquer that country. I will also come with armies to assist you. Gandharvas were great warriors. They defended their country more than their own life. There was no dearth of weapons for them. Yet, how can they withstand your army? You must not give up a country like Gandharva. While defending your country, you have to occupy another country and keep it under your control." This is the summary of that message.

With extreme joy, Rama became *serene*.

If I conquer this due to Yudhajit's encouragement, Gandharva country must belong to Bharata.

Then the expansion of the Kosala kingdom will take place and I will get the fame that I gave kingdoms to my younger brothers.

The attack on Gandharva country must take place forthwith.

"King among sages! The news that you have brought has made me very happy. I am also looking for rich and wealthy kingdoms. We will do as per your message." Rama agreed obediently.

"Rama! I have heard that Gandharvas are very strong. There is no dearth of weapons and people there, I am told."

"King among sages! We need not worry. We have mighty armies that excel them in all ways. Gandharva country will be ours."

Determined to make the two sons of

501.Uttara kanda, sarga 112, sloka 8:

Rama did not marry again. "Without marrying another woman other than Sita, whenever he wanted to perform a sacrifice, he used to keep a statue of a gold Sita beside him."

If there is a statue, it is enough! It is like Sita's presence.

There is no difference between Sita and the statue.

In the *Ramayana*, the poet has nowhere used expressions like 'vow of commitment to one wife' (*eeka patnii vratam*) or 'a man who is committed to one wife' (*eeka patnii vratudu*) referring to Rama.

Uttara kanda, sarga 112, slokas 15 to 17: While Rama was ruling the kingdom, Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaika became old and died. They were unlucky after their death. They went to heaven, met Dasaratha and were entangled in the duties of devoted wives.

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Bharata as kings of Gandharva country, Rama installed Takshaka and Pushpaka as Gandharva kings by a ceremony.[502]

Rama immediately ordered Bharata to start off with an army enough for the battle.

Accompanied by sage Gargya, Bharata started with armies and first reached Kekaya kingdom. From there, Yudhajit also started with his armies. Immediately, they invaded the Gandharva kingdom. The Gandharvas were great warriors. Risking their lives, they were ready to fight the enemy.

A fierce battle took place between the two sides.

The earth was filled with pools of blood and heaps of dead bodies.

The battle went on for seven days without any conclusive conquest.

Finally, on the eighth day, when the last warrior among the Gandharvas was killed, the country came under the control of Bharata.

Gandharva country is full of beautiful cities, flower gardens, fruit gardens, riches, wealth and temples.

Bharata stayed for some time in Gandharva country, divided it into two parts, crowned both the sons and went back to Ayodhya after his sons' reign was consolidated.

On hearing all that Bharata said, Rama felt very happy. "Satrughna's sons and your sons have got kingdoms. Kosala is already there for my sons. Now, Lakshmana's sons need their own kingdoms. Look for any other kingdom, which *is swinging with riches and wealth*. We will occupy it", said Rama resolutely.

Gathering information about all the countries, Bharata conveyed some good news to his elder brother. "Karupadha country is good in all respects. Rich and wealthy. It will be nice if we conquer that country.

On hearing all the relevant details Rama said, "Yes. This is favourable for us. It will come under our control soon with ease." He ordered the army to attack Karupadha country.

A fierce battle took place between Rama's armies and the people of Karupadha.

Soon, Rama became victorious.

Making the two sons of Lakshmana — Angada and Chandraketu as kings of

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502. Uttara kanda, sarga 113, slokas 10 to 13: All that Rama did in the name of ruling was to occupy other countries one after another! And killed those kings!

The news, which Yudhajit sent: "Gandharva country is the one that lies on both the sides of the river Sindhu. Filled with fruits and roots, extremely beautiful... Defend your city.... bring that Gandharva country under your control.... That is extremely good."

"Hearing this news, Rama was overwhelmed with joy, agreed to it and said to sage Gargya, 'O sage! The two sons of Bharata will live in that country.... Keeping Bharata in the forefront, Taksha and Pushpaka will kill the sons of Gandharva and separate the two cities. Bharata will appoint his sons there and come back to me', said Rama and permitted Bharata to go along with the army and crown his sons".

According to this story, the Gandharvas were not Rama's enemies. They were not 'wicked' like Rakshasas!

Rama was a virtuous man, wasn't he? Instead of ruling his own kingdom, why should he invade another country unjustly? This means, Rama was a kind of king who plundered other kingdoms!

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Karupadha, Rama and Lakshmana returned to Ayodhya.[503]

Thus, Rama ruled Kosala along the path of '*Dharma*' (Justice) and became whatever other kings who ruled kingdoms became.

He became whatever other human beings — who were born and lived for some time — became.[504]

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[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

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[503] **Uttara kanda, sarga 115, up to 10 slokas:** See what Rama says after conquering Gandharva country. "Lakshmana! Your sons — both Angada and Chandraketu — are well versed in morals. They can rule the country. They are highly valorous. I will crown the two....Select a beautiful place. That place should be comfortable for kings. It must be such that it is not an obstacle to others.

When Rama said so, Bharata said as follows: 'There is a country called Karupadha. It is very beautiful... healthy'. Hearing these words of Bharata, Rama agreed to this and occupied it first, then crowned Lakshmana's sons in that country. The poet is anxious to say, 'Rama gave kingdoms to his brothers. See how noble he is!' The poet did not think that invading and occupying countries, which are not hostile to one, would bring a lot of disrepute to Rama. 'Disrepute' — not only from the present day perspective. Also from the perspective of those days as well. Those invasions were unjust even from the perspective of those days. ★

[504] **Uttara kanda, sargas 116 to 123:** While Rama ruled following the path of Dharma, Yama came to Rama in the guise of a sage. "Rama! I want to speak to you confidentially. If you promise me that you will kill any one who interrupts us while we talk, I will say whatever I want", said Yama. (*In the mouths of these guys, we do not found other word except killing and slaying!*)

Rama agreed, called Lakshmana, told him about it and sent him out.

Yama began to talk. "I am Yama. In the past birth, I was your son. (*Thank god, you have not said, 'in this birth'! I had to give you Ayodhya!*) Brahma has sent me to you. He wanted me to say to you thus, "Rama! When you united the entire world and lay in the sea, you gave birth to me. (*In which birth? Tell us about it first!*) You had given me the responsibility of creation. (*Yes. Rama must have given it. He is very lazy to do work.*) You have been helping the gods whenever it is necessary for protecting the world. You were born as Rama for the sake of killing Ravana. You had decided to live on the earth for ten thousand, ten hundred years and assumed human form. (*Why don't you say 'eleven thousand years Mr. Poet? Don't you know arithmetic? Does metre not suit it?*) Would you like to remain on the earth still or would you like to return? This is what Brahma has asked me to find out from you", said Yama. (*This is a great secret!*)

Rama said, "Yes, I was born to fulfil the task of the three worlds. I have finished my work! I am thinking of coming."

Meanwhile sage Durvasa came to the entrance and said to Lakshmana, "I want to see Rama immediately".

Lakshmana bowed obediently and said, "The king is engaged in some important →

➔ work. We cannot call him now. Tell me what your work is. I will do it."

"It is not possible. If you do not tell Rama at once that I had come, I will curse all of you, your family and the kingdom", the *sage danced with anger.*

Lakshmana was unable to decide what to do. "Shall I go inside and call Rama? He will impose the death penalty on me. All right, I will die. If I do not call Rama, the entire kingdom will be destroyed." Lakshmana went to Rama and told him about the *leaps of anger* of Durvasa.

Ravana got worried, sent Yama away and came running to Durvasa and asked him, "What do you want?"

"I have done penance for a thousand years. I have finished it just now. I am so hungry that I cannot tell you how hungry I am. I want food at once", said Durvasa. (*Why the hell did the man not tell Lakshmana? Having done penance for thousand years, had he not acquired that much sense? Stupid fellow! What do you get from penance, except arrogance?*)

Feeling very happy at the words of Durvasa, Sri Rama offered him food.

Durvasa ate the food and left.

Then Rama remembered his promise to Yama and sat sorrowfully. Consoling his brother, Lakshmana said, "Your Excellency! Is this sorrow for my sake? No. Do not grieve. One who goes back on his word will fall into hell. For my sake, do not fall into hell. Kill me and keep your promise. Protect Dharma."

Rama called all the ministers and asked them to think about it.

All of them suggested abandoning Lakshmana. (*They are the ministers of the same king, aren't they?*) Otherwise, the promise will be broken and the three worlds will perish, they said. They also said, 'Did your father not abandon you for the sake of Dharma?"

Rama decided to abandon Lakshmana.

"Lakshmana! I give you up. When it is obligatory to punish a good man, it is the same whether one kills or abandons him. Go away", Rama said.

(*It is the poet's intention to say, 'Rama abandons even his brothers in order to protect morality. To gather heaps of fame for Rama, the poet makes him do any vile act. According to him, one gets fame if he commits wicked acts!*)

Lakshmana went to the bank of the river Sarayu with tears, closed all the *nine apertures* of the body and sat there without inhaling.

Devendra came and took Lakshmana to heaven along with his body. (*Lakshmana lost his life by committing suicide. This is the result of his lifelong service to Rama!*)

Rama said to his ministers, "I will give Kosala to Bharata and go away to the forests. I will also follow Lakshmana. Make all the arrangements for Bharata's coronation."

Bharata said, "Abandoning you, Can I rule the kingdom? Give the kingdom to Kusa and Lava. As we are going to heaven, call Satrughna as well."

Rama divided Kosala into two parts, created different cities as capital cities, crowned Kusa and Lava.

All the people fell before Rama and wailed, "We too will come along with you. Take us along as well."

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➔ "All right. All of you may come along", said Rama.

Some messengers went to Satrughna, informed him every thing and said, "All the people in Ayodhya are leaving for heaven along with Rama (*ayoodhyaam vijanaan kritvaa = Making Ayodhya without people*). He asked us to bring you too."

Satrughna gave away the kingdom to his sons and came back to Rama.

Sugriva too gave Kishkindha kingdom to Angada and came to Rama. (*Sugriva! Relying on heaven, have you given up beautiful kingdom? There will not be Rambha in heaven, you know!*)

Vibhishana too came along.

Rama said to Vibhishana, "You live forever. As long as people live on the earth (*as long as they remain fools*). As long as the sun and the moon stay, your kingdom will remain. (*So, even now Vibhishana must be there! If we catch Vibhishana now, we will know all the details of Rama.*) The god of Ikshvaku's is Jagannatha. Worship that god!" Rama ordered Vibhishana to stay back in Lanka.

Then, Rama said to Hanuman, "You too live for ever! As long as my story is circulated in the world, you will stay alive. (*As he will be alive as long as Rama's story is alive, it is an obligation on the part of Hanuman to keep Rama's story alive!*)

That night passed. Next day, at dawn, while Brahmins were walking in the front along with fire, Rama, wearing silk garments, holding sacred grass, reciting the *Gayatri* mantra started for *Mahaprasthanam* (a great journey).

Riches, wealth, agriculture, Rama's weapons, bow and every thing followed Rama in human forms. Vedas, Gayatri, Omkar also followed Rama. Sages, Brahmins, maidservants, children, aged, women in the harem, Vanaras, ministers, all people, worms, insects, animals, birds, and all animate and inanimate beings followed Rama. Ayodhya became vacant. (*If Rama is not there, the nature itself must perish! Nothing should remain!*)

Rama reached the bank of the river Sarayu and started stepping into the water. To invite Rama, Brahma came in an airplane and he was ready. "Rama! Welcome to you! Enter into whatever body you want!", said Brahma.

Hearing Brahma's words, Rama, the great wise man entered the light of Vishnu along with his brothers." (*This means, Rama entered the river, lost his life and became Vishnu*).

Vishnu said to Brahma, 'All these people are my devotees. They have come with me. Give all of them pious worlds." (*As if saying, 'Give water to all these people!'*)

"All your devotees will stay in Saantaanika world beyond Brahma's world. (*Why? Why can't they stay in Brahma's world?*)

All the people drowned in the river Sarayu, gave up their lives smilingly and went to pious worlds. All the Vanaras joined those gods from whom they had originally descended. Sugriva went to the sun. (*Sugriva! When will you come again? Remember the throne of Kishkindha!*)

Keeping all the devotees in heaven, Vishnu went back to Vaikuntha.

Here ends 'Uttara kanda'

★

What are the Benefits of Reading or Listening to '*Ramayana*'?

At the end of 'Yuddha kanda' and at the end of 'Uttara kanda', the poet narrates the benefits from reading or listening to the '*Ramayana*'.

In **Yuddha kanda, sarga 131, slokas 102 to the end**.

In **Uttara kanda, the whole of sarga 124.**

See how many kinds of bribe the poet has offered to make the people read the '*Ramayana*'.

By listening to Sri Rama's coronation (that is the story up to Rama's coronation), those who desire money will get money and those who expect sons will get sons. (*But sir! Even people of other countries who have not seen* ***the face of 'Ramayana'*** *also beget sons!*)

If a king listens to *Ramayana*, he will defeat the enemies and conquer the earth. (*If those enemies also listen to 'Ramayana'? Who will be victorious? Whoever possesses more might will be victorious, won't he? Then what is the use of listening to the 'Ramayana'?*)

If women listen, they will beget living sons (*jiva putraha*) like Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaika. (*of course, death of the husbands is inevitable!*)

Those who listen to the *Ramayana* which tells us the victory of Rama — who does not make others grieve (*aklishta karmanaha raamasya*), will attain long life. (*That long life is also for reciting Rama's name, isn't it? So, what is the use of that long life?*)

Whoever conquers the anger (*jit kroodhaha* = one who conquers anger) and listens to *Ramayana* attentively will over come his difficulties. (*So, one has to overcome anger before listening to ' Ramayana'. Then he will not get angry even if he listens to all the atrocities of Rama. Therefore, first conquer anger and listen attentively. The poet has fears that people may not listen attentively. If you read attentively, you will overcome difficulties! If Rama (his atrocities) could not make you angry, what will difficulties do to you?*)

If a person listens to the *Ramayana*, gods and dead ancestors will be happy. Spirits that cause hurdles will flee from that house. (*Unable to 'listen' Ramayana?*)

Pregnant women will beget excellent (*anuttamaan*) sons. (*If two women listen to' Ramayana', the son of the second woman will be greater than the son of the first woman! If ten women listen to ' Ramayana', the son of the first woman will surpass the sons of the remaining nine women! The same is the case with the remaining nine also*).

If one reads this ancient epic with reverence, all sins will perish. (*Not sins but all knowledge will perish!*)

Kshatriyas ought to bow and listen to it from Brahmins. If they do so, they will get wealth and sons. No doubt. (*Poet has doubt that people may not believe it!*)

Rama will have love for those who always listen or read the *Ramayana*. (*Is it not enough if somebody reads it once? Does he have to read it always?*)

It is said (*utyat*) that Rama is eternal. The first god. The long armed one. Hari. Narayana. Lord Vishnu. Lakshmana is Adi Seshu. (*utyat = It is said. The poet does not know all these things. These are the things which people before him said. Since the elders say so, this man is repeating it.*)

If we hear this auspicious epic, money and grain increase. The family will also increase. (*Then what is the use? If the size of the family also increases while money and grain increase, the situation will be as before, isn't it? So listening to the Ramayana is a waste!*)

One can get the best women and pleasures on this earth. (*A man who reads the story of a man who had the' vow of one wife' will get more women! Perhaps, men are afraid of the 'vow of one wife' and will marry many women. All those women are best. That is, devoted wives! Therefore, women who listen to this story will become devoted wives but men will not be devoted husbands. The poet who wrote the story of a man who had the vow of one wife is awarding devoted wives to men. Then what about women? He could have said, 'women who listen to Rama's story will get husbands who are 'devoted to one wife only.' However, they do not say so. At every place, they teach for the sake of men, for the sake of their domination!*)

One should read this epic as a rule since it gives long life, health, fame, sense, comfort and affection for the brothers (*As much affection as Rama has for his brothers! It will give anything but does not give any sense.*)

This is past history. Read it carefully. Let the strength of Vishnu increase! (*If devotees of Vishnu increase in number, it is tantamount to the strength of Vishnu!*)

Those who rewrite the history of Rama, which the first poet Valmiki composed (*with odd things, miracles, myths and lies, which did not strike to Valmiki*) and those who got it rewritten (*in order to get rid of their sins)* will live in heaven. *(If all such people go to heaven, how pleasant this earth will be!*)

So far, this is *Phala sruti* (fruits of listening *Ramayana*.)

'Phala sruti' in Uttara kanda also talks of the same kinds of gains. There are only a couple of things that are new.

A person will be free from all sins if he reads one sloka, or one line or even one word. (*So, commit any number of sins! Never mind! There is a way out. It is enough if you read one word in 'Ramayana'!*)

It is enough if you read one sarga. It fetches you piety of performing a thousand Aswamedha sacrifices. (*That is, piety of killing a thousand horses! What will we do with so much piety? Let us do any number of sins, piety will still remain!*)

The person who reads the *Ramayana* and the person who donated gold for the eclipse of the sun in Kurukshetra will receive the same kind of piety. (*Both of them become foolish!*)

One should donate clothes and gold to the person who recites the *Ramayana*. Gods feel satisfied only if the story-teller is satisfied. (*If gods are satisfied, they do not give us any thing. Do not waste your gold unnecessarily.*)

Those who listen to Rama's history in

toto (*only if you listen totally. This is the condition!*) will reach Vishnu. Also his fathers and grandfathers. No doubt. (*This means, it is doubtful. Fathers, grand fathers, grandsons and every body will go to 'Rambha'. Vishnu also goes to Rambha. So, they meet Vishnu in this way!*)

This story happened in the past. This will do good to you. Read it without fail! Read it with full faith. (*We read and listen to stories of this sort for entertainment. We can do this much. Do we have to believe it? This is not possible for us, you see!*)

★ ★

The only way to fulfil wishes of every one in human society is to read and listen to *Ramayana*!

People want money in life. They want health. They want male children. They want beautiful devoted wives. They must conquer enemies. They must gain upper hand over the neighbour. Others should not be equal to them. If they go to distant places, they want to return safely. They want to live long. They do not want obstacles or troubles in domestic affairs. Even if one commits many sins, he has to get piety. As long as he lives, he must be happy and prosperous and should sit beside god.

All these are wishes of human society.

"All your wishes will be fulfilled. Come on, read the *Ramayana*", says the poet.

People have been believing these words innocently with a lot of hope for hundreds of years.

The poet says there are many gains if we read *Ramayana*, doesn't he? Read *Ramayana* without fail in order to ascertain how far the poet's words are true.

However, one condition! Read it like a story! Do not start with the belief that 'Rama is a god'. Look at him as a character in a story!

When a dispute comes before you and you ought to give judgement, you will put aside all your likes, dislikes and beliefs and hear it, don't you? Read like that.

From where do people get money if they listen to *Ramayana*? How do they get it? How do conditions in life change? What is the connection between reading the *Ramayana* and the birth of sons? People who did not listen to it also beget sons, don't they? Think in this manner, read the *Ramayana*!

If questioning starts at one place, it will continue like this.

It is really necessary to read *Ramayana*. We will know about it only if we read it, don't we?

By reading it, we get neither money nor heaven.

We will understand Rama's greatness. We will understand how unjust the values and culture of the *Ramayana* — both then and now! We will also understand who *Ramayana* favours or opposes — both then and now!

All the beliefs that the *Ramayana* is a holy book will be scattered.

For those who have been under an illusion and in ignorance for a long time — this is an eye opener. This is progress in the process of thinking as well as grasping truth.

This change, which begins along with the path of progress, will not stop at *Ramayana* only. Its march is forward and further forward! Towards more progress! ★

[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

Valmiki as a Poet

Valmiki was a poet who composed this work at a time when arts like story telling and 'writing (literature)' were still in their infancy. All the mistakes that possibly occur in the writings of (historical-) childhood are present in Valmiki's 'writing'.

We need to examine a little bit the nature of Valmiki's writing for the sake of those people who argue with blind reverence that Valmiki was a great enlightened person, that he knew more than the poets of subsequent period, that he did not commit a single mistake and that he is not responsible for the mistakes found in his writings and so on.

The *Ramayana* is a story that glorified the race which was victorious in the battles that took place among different races. It is also a story of 'god'. Hence people have blind reverence for its poet. The poets of Interpolations have also glorified the story. Yet, devotees of Valmiki have baseless hatred for the poets of Interpolations. Mistakes in this writing might be not only due to the poets of Interpolations but also due to the original poet. But the devotees of Valmiki do not realise this fact.

We may assume two types of reasons for the mistakes and shortcomings in the *Ramayana*.

1. This is literature composed in mythological form.

2. The theme is based on unreal things and false values.

All shortcomings in this writing relate to any one of these two reasons.

(1) Let us see how mistakes occur due to the mythical form of the story: If all the incidents in a given writing happen in a realistic manner as they happen in real life, we do not find contradiction between one incident and another. However, if one occurs in mythical form while another occurs in real form, there is not any coherence between the two. Here mistakes are inevitable.

In this story, Rama, who is the main character, appears as a human being as well as a superhuman being. He is a superhuman being who relieves *stones and the like* from their curses and gives them beautiful forms! However, to cross a river he boards a boat! He is a superhuman who can turn all the worlds into ashes with one arrow! However, he cries loudly as he is unable to know how to cross the sea! A great man who can give wealth to all human beings! However, he feels so anxious for his riches, wealth, royal comforts and for the property from his father! All these are contradictions! These contradictions arose since the same character was both human as well as superhuman.

Rama is divinely powerful to make Samudra, the god of the sea appear before him. This is a feature of a superhuman. A myth.

The same Rama is afraid of crossing the ocean. This is a human characteristic. A reality. If these two kinds of behaviour are present in the same character, it is an inconsistency. This makes the character ridiculous.

"There is a king. He does not have children" — this is reality. "Gods gave boons to that king. They sent *Paayas*, a kind of sweet, for getting children." This is a myth. Now the inconsistencies begin.

If all incidents are real then such stories are social in nature. Not mythology. If all the incidents are myths, the story does not proceed.

Rama built a bridge with his miraculous power. — This is a myth. If Ravana demolishes that bridge with his miracle? If one myth is used against another myth?

The burning of Lanka by Hanuman with his miracle is a myth! As Rakshasas also possess miracles, if they extinguish those flames and keep Lanka unaffected? There will not be a story at all.

In mythology, the story proceeds only when myths and reality are combined. However, owing to that, many mistakes appear. Nowhere do we find that myths are without mistakes. This kind of literature is like this.

The poet, however, can take precautions. Such precautions will reduce some inconsistencies. This is how it can be done: Rama need not grieve so much before crossing the sea. If the poet had shown as if Rama thought for a while, "How to cross this?" it will not be ridiculous. Similarly, there is a lot of scope to rectify the behaviour of this character. However, taking precautions is not a feature of mythology. Because, logic and mythology do not go together. Exaggerating every thing in a story is the feature of mythology. "Why is so much exaggeration needed? Rama is a hero, isn't he? If we show that a character as if he is too afraid and as if he wailed too much, it will not be apt. To argue like this is logic! The poet may or may not be aware of this logic. The poet's speciality is seen here. While depicting an incident, if the poet concentrated on reality, exaggerations would diminish and the behaviour of a character would be apt. Or, if the poet does not pay attention to reality, no incident might be in accordance with the spirit of the character.

Depending on the way the story proceeds, the poet decides where to depict reality and where to incorporate myths. Sometimes depending on his partial attitude also. If the story has to proceed in such a way that Hanuman triumphs in Lanka, the poet makes Hanuman perform all the miracles. He makes the Lankan people incapable.

If it is necessary to show Rama feeling sad in a scene, Rama's enemies do miracles and Rama remains an ordinary human being. Depending upon the way in which the story ought to proceed, the poet decides as to who should perform miracles. (*The present day writings, which depend on a very minute aspect of reality and filled with myths, are also mythologies. Social mythologies!*)

Because of the method of writing that consists of some mythical incidents and some real incidents, mistakes crop up throughout the story of the '*Ramayana*'! We need not consider those mistakes that crop up in *Ramayana* or any such story because it is mythology. Just as we translate things from one language to another, we have to translate mythical incidents into reality.

(2) What are the false things in the theme? Bharata had the right over the Kosala kingdom. This is the actual fact. Rama knew about this. (*He himself tells about it later to Bharata.*) Yet he was ready for his coronation. However intelligently and shrewdly the poet may write, how can he depict a character that was ready to take up the reins of the kingdom even though he knew he had no right as a noble character? It is not possible. The poet has to handle the story in such a way that 'Rama does not know about Bharata's right to the kingdom'. The poet could make characters other than Rama say that Dasaratha had promised king Kekaya. Then Rama becomes faultless... All right! Then what about Dasaratha? It is not possible for the poet to rescue Dasaratha as he can rescue Rama. How can the poet convince readers that Dasaratha was committed to truth since he violated his promise that he would give the kingdom to Kaika's son? It is not possible. Only if the story proceeds as if Dasaratha did not promise Kaika's father, the later part of the story will be justified. However, if the story changes in such a way, it would not be *Ramayana* at all. If the poet wants to make Dasaratha a truthful man, Dasaratha has to make arrangements to hand over the kingdom to Bharata as per his promise. Bharata has to refuse to take the kingdom and should ask his father to give it to Rama. If the story proceeds along these lines, all characters would become noble.

However, there would not be Rama's exile to forests and the killing of Ravana. There would not be a *Ramayana*.

It is not possible for any poet in the world to describe Dasaratha and Rama as noble characters while retaining the story in the present form. Even if any poet other than Valmiki writes the same story more shrewdly, he might avoid certain minor mistakes but he cannot create coherence between falsity and nobility. If you ask, 'Is Rama not noble in the present story', the answer is 'No'. It is the poet's over anxiety to throw all the wrongs of Rama on to others and make Rama a good man. "Rama and Dasaratha are very noble persons. I am saying this, believe me! The entire fault lies with Kaika. In fact, it is not even Kaika's. It is of Manthara. In fact, it is not even Manthara's. It is destiny! Who can overcome the decision of the destiny?" says the poet — as if it is a brilliant answer.

Another point: 'Janasthana' belongs to the Rakshasas. It is Ravana's territory. Why did Rama go to Janasthana? "To live in the forests", says the poet. This is a big lie even according to the story. Why did Rama not spend the remaining period of exile in the same forest where he initially lived for ten years? He stopped neither at Chitrakuta nor at Agastya's place. He moved further and entered the land of Rakshasas. According to this story, what was Rama's attempt? To occupy the land of the Rakshasas!

"Rama is leading the life of a sage", says the poet. However, we do not at all find the life of a sage in the behaviour of Rama. Sages do not hunt. They do not fight battles. However, Rama hunts. He fights battles.

The poet argues as if great injustice has been done to Rama since his coronation was stopped; as if somebody deprived him of his right, as if he went to Janasthana for the sake of living in the forest, as if he was leading the life of a sage through fighting battles and so on. However, none of these arguments stands.

The entire theme of the story was born out of lies. This is the story about the occupation of the lands and wealth of other tribes by Rama's group. This is the actual truth. If the poet attempts to show this as a struggle that took place for the sake of *Dharma* (justice), lies and deceitful arguments will inevitably appear. Further, the themes in the story, namely, reverence for father, devotion to husband (slavery to the husband), noble race, upper caste — all are false values. These are false values not only from the present day perspective but also from the perspective of the past. They are based on injustice. As these are matters of internal contradictions, contradictions emerge at every point in the story.

All the mistakes in this story are of not of the same kind. Some are very minor, while some are very major. Among the minor mistakes, there are many that resulted from the forgetfulness of the poet. For example, Mountain Prasravana was near Panchavati and Rishyamuka was near Kishkindha. But, the poet never remembers this fact. There were many instances when he referred to Rishyamuka Mountain as Prasravana Mountain.

Similarly, referring to the female Rakshasa Angaraka as Simhika and Mayavi as Dundubhi — All these mistakes were due to forgetfulness.

When Rama fought with Khara in Janasthana, a man called Trisera was killed. Even in the battle at Lanka, a person called Trisera was killed. The same thing happened in the case of Akampana and Narantaka. Unless we have evidence to argue other than their names, it is not possible to argue that both Triseras were one and the same. There might be many persons with the same name. Even if it was proved that both Triseras were one and the same, this point falls under the category of mistakes committed due to forgetfulness.

Some descriptions in Valmiki's writing

Rivers are flowing swiftly as if they are laughing. Mountains appeared as if crying with waterfalls. Clouds leaned on the peaks of the mountains as if mountains have extended further. The wind intruded into the bamboo bushes as if the entire forest was laughing. Mountains looked as if they had covered themselves with clouds. The mountains spread around as if they were walking. Mountains appeared as if the sun rays lifted the earth with love. The stones glittered as if they were looking with their eyes wide open. The earth filled with trees appeared as if it was calling with raised hands. The Sun who was rising at a distance appeared as if he had turned into the moon that showers cold.

Rivers spread across the earth like threads. Mountains are shining with fire flies, the Lotus is covered with snow. Sky filled with birds. Trees filled with flowery stars.

All these are real descriptions of nature. We can enjoy these descriptions of nature. We can enjoy these descriptions wholeheartedly. However, descriptions in the name of romance that see only sex at every step are loathsome. The reddened evening appeared like a man who smeared sandal paste out of sexual desire. The huge trees, which are fully blossomed, looked like lustful men who had applied perfumes. The flowers, which were swinging in the wind, looked like intoxicant women who desired sex. The sand platforms in the dried up rivers looked like the thighs of the loves.

In these descriptions, we do not find any nature — except vulgarity of the poet or the characters!

- *Observe these descriptions, which show conditions of human beings in society.*

Like a fire place, which the Chandala has touched! Like a girl who has left the upper caste and joined a low caste! Like loss of opportunity to gain money! Like a defied command! Like a Sudra who is unfit for Vedic mantras! — In these descriptions, society appears. We will know how human relations are. These kinds of descriptions tell about the past to the subsequent generations.

Some good descriptions

"Just as a hunter sang a song, trapped a deer and killed it."

"Just as goats perished under the domination of foxes"

"Just as keeping a snake in his lap, Ravana kept Sita, who is the cause of his death, on his thigh"

"Just as searching for a medicine in a huge jungle…."

"Like a mirror to which exhalation touched, the moon is without glow."

"Just as hot oil drops fell down, tears fell down from Ravana's eyes which were filled with fury."

"Rama expanded like a banyan tree with his relatives and supporters. Ravana! You are trying to wipe your eyes with a needle and smacking the sword with a tongue. You and Rama differ as much as the difference between dirt and sandal paste."

"Just as a fly cannot digest a diamond if it swallows it, I will not yield to you."

"Like the help given to an ungrateful man, my devotion to my husband, has gone waste."

Descriptions of this sort are very appropriate to the story and the nature of characters that talk.

- *However, through out the book there are wrong descriptions and wrong similes that exceed good descriptions and good similes!*

"Like a Kinnera women who has lost her Kinnera man in the Himalayas, Sita will die wailing for me." — Who, do you think, had uttered these words? Dasaratha! The father-in-law is a Kinnera man and daughter-in-law is a Kinnera woman! Valmiki's devotees at once say, "Well, this is an interpolation". All right! It is an Interpolation! Why, then, even that poet of Interpolation, wrote like this? Was he not aware that one should not compare daughter-in-law with a Kinnera woman and father-in-law with a Kinnera man?

Even if he was aware, he had used such similes, hadn't he? Similarly, why can't we assume that Valmiki too did the same thing for the same reason?

Do you remember how the poet had described while Rama, Sita and Lakshmana were going through the forest after crossing the river Ganga? He described Sita as 'a female elephant between two male elephants'! In the same manner, he described Ravana's hand around Sita's waist as an ornament around her waist. These are the descriptions that have no reference to the context. Descriptions for description sake!

"Because of unhesitating words of Kaika, Dasaratha was not capable of coming out of the bondage of truth just as Emperor Bali could not do in respect of Vamana." ('*indrakritam yadha*', said the poet. The translators are presenting Indra as Vamana). — This means, just as Emperor Bali promised Vamana to give three feet of space and could not come out of that bondage of promise when he realized Vamana's intention, similarly Dasaratha too promised boons to Kaika but could not come out of that bondage of boons. The poet has compared Dasaratha, who is a good person in his view, with Bali and compared Kaika, who is a wicked person in his view, with Vamana! If Vamana was a wicked man Kaika too will be a wicked person. Do you say that the meaning of Indra is not Vamana? Even if Indra was Indra, Indra is also a good character in the view of the poet. Even then, this comparison is wrong.

"**D**asaratha entered that building in which Rama, Sita and Lakshmana are not present now and which was like a water pond that was originally difficult to enter due to the presence of great serpents, which Garuda had killed subsequently." — This means Rama, Sita and Lakshmana used to be a menace to that building just as snakes used to be a menace to the water pond! The snakes in the water pond had an enemy that would kill them. Garuda is that enemy. Do we have to acknowledge that Rama too had such an enemy? This is comparing Rama with the snake and Rama's enemy with Garuda. Even this is a wrong simile.

Jatayu to Ravana: "Just as it is impossible to condemn Vedas by means of the principles of logic, you cannot take away Sita while I watch her." — Ravana, however, abducted Sita while Jatayu was watching. This means, it is proved that one can condemn Vedas by means of logic.

"**R**ama killing Vali is like tiger killing the king of animals (lion)". — Comparing Rama with tiger and Vali with the lion! (*Of course, this is true!*)

"**I** am grieving like a thief who is caught and punishable for the crime against the crown." — Does any one compare himself with a culprit who is punishable?

"**J**ust as the doctor cut the infant into pieces in the womb itself when it did not come out, Ravana will cut me into pieces". — The doctor does so in order to save the mother. It is a good thing. Comparison between Ravana killing Sita and the good act of a doctor is not appropriate.

Sugriva to Rama: "Just as an ungrateful man abandons friendship, you abandon grief." — Abandoning friendship by an ungrateful man is a bad thing. If Rama gives up grief, it is a good thing. Therefore, this simile is not apt.

Sugriva's wailing when Vali died: "Just as pure gold remains after burning gold when the impurities in gold vanish, good qualities in me are leaving me, unable to withstand the sin that I committed in killing my brother." (*Bad qualities remain. Are these like gold?*)

"**R**ivers, defying elders called banks, are going to the husband called Samudra" — Is going to the husband defying elders? Moreover, it is an act, which is in accordance with the wishes of the elders.

"**W**ith arrows pierced into the whole body, Lakshmana who is wet with blood is like a sun that is emitting rays while setting."

Vanara army with Angada: "As a master you are like a wife to us. We have to protect you — who is our protector — just as we protect our wives."

There is no end to these kinds of similes.

- *At every step in the story, there are numerous instances of unnecessary drama and unnecessary descriptions.*

Ravana comes for Sita in the guise of a sage (good guise). On seeing a person in such a guise all the birds and animals trembled, trees remained immobile, Godavari shrunk — Here, there is a bundle of description. Is there a need to say that nature became like this on seeing the sage? This means, since Ravana is a bad character, he appeared frightening even in the guise of a sage. If it is so, even Sita must be afraid on seeing that sage. However, Sita invites him cordially. Only trees and birds were afraid.

The descriptions made while Ravana was abducting Sita about the falling of flowers and jewels were very tiring but still they were appropriate to the context. However, that description goes like a beautiful scene.

As per the story, Sugriva is a good man. A good friend of Rama. Hanuman is a great devotee of Rama. A servant. In fact, all Vanaras were Rama's servants. However, the story proceeds as if none came from Kishkindha to Rama during the rainy season while Rama stayed on the Rishyamuka. In Kishkindha, Sugriva, without any fault on his part, ordered the armies in time. Hanuman, sitting in Kishkindha, was showering unlimited reverence on Rama. However, he did not go to Rama. He did not inform him about the attempts to mobilise the army. Hence, the poet says, Rama got angry. If the story proceeds along a straight line according to its original character, there was no scope for Rama's anger. Sugriva should have informed Rama about all that was happening in Kishkindha.

It was poet's intention to create some drama between Rama and Sugriva with such scenes as Sugriva not visiting Rama; Rama not knowing as to what had happened to preparations for the battle, Rama getting uncontrollable anger, Rama shouting that he would destroy his friend Sugriva (*Poor fellow, Rama did not have any battles after he climbed that mountain!*), Rama sending Lakshmana as a messenger to Sugriva, Lakshmana reprimanding Sugriva, Sugriva trying to hide himself in the corners with fear and so on.

'Drama' should emerge naturally while the story proceeds smoothly in accordance with its nature. If the poet thinks, 'let me insert drama here for a while' and inserts it without reference to the context, it cannot be drama. Thus, the poet's attempts to create drama without reference to the context through out the story are not few.

When he visited Sita at Asoka vana, Hanuman keeps Rama's ring with him and does not show it to Sita as soon as he arrived there. He tries to make Sita believe him by his words only. It was the poet's intention to create scenes like Sita suspecting Hanuman and being afraid on seeing him. The poet thinks that these scenes are not possible if Hanuman shows it at the very beginning. The poet could show that Sita did not believe Hanuman even after he had shown her the ring.

- *In many scenes, there is no coherence between the intended point and the manner of telling.*

See the scene in which Rama wails when he could not find Sita. Here what is the point? He does not know whether his wife is dead or something has happened to her. This is a big danger. He has to search for her. How did he search? What is the method of writing adopted there?

Rama began to enact all the stages of romantic and sexual separation from his wife. He asked flowers, birds and dragon flies! "O antelope! Have you seen my Sita who has eyes that resemble your eyes? O palm tree! Have you seen my Sita who has breasts that resemble the size of your fruits?" This is how it went on. Is this a context in which one experiences romance? Is sexual description necessary here? If the poet describes buttocks and breasts, do readers feel that Rama is feeling sad? Does one depict breasts in a tragic scene in which one has to feel sad and suffer agony? If the poet wishes to handle the story in such a way that Rama talks to flowers and birds, it ought to be a very happy scene. Suppose Rama and Sita were playing the game of hide and seek in the garden. Sita hid somewhere. Rama has to search for her. Then it would be nice if he asked flowers, birds or ants. Then there will not be a contradiction between the content and the form (manner of telling the story).

A description of romantic separation in a context where one is expected to be upset with grief — implies that there is no coherence between the content and the form (of narration)!

However, the same thing happens in feudal literature. Because there is no place for logic in that literature. There are not any questions.

In reality, even in such a society, human beings surely feel sad when they face hardships. However, mythological stories do not depend on naturalness. The predominant feature of this literature is to describe gods, kings, riches, wealth, weapons and the body parts of women. The poet has to insert those descriptions somewhere or other in the stories. He will not care whether there is coherence between the context and the description.

The Vanara army reaches the sea. Then all important people ought to think about the battle. However, Rama, amidst so many people, begins to express his romantic separation and grief thus, "When will I embrace the breasts of my Sita!"

All those soldiers had also left their wives and children behind and come here risking their lives. In such a context, this enlightened Rama prattles like this! On seeing his sexual pain, all people have to shed tears!

These contradictions are found not only in major scenes. If there are only two words, we find a contradiction between them! When Vibhishana came to join Rama's camp, Sugriva's words: "This good (*buddhiman*) Rakshasa will kill us." Good man! Killing! Although this is a context in which one speaks angrily about Vibhishana, it is the eagerness of the poet to praise Vibhishana!

Valmiki's devotees, however, may argue here, "The word *buddhiman* is an interpolation!" — With such arguments as these they cannot defend Valmiki.

Only if we understand the features of mythological literature, justice will be done to Valmiki. In stories where there is no place for logic, no poet can do any thing than this.

We may notice certain features in this form of writing.

(1) A character does not speak while another character spoke and until its speech is completed. Because of this, some contexts appear ridiculous.

(2) The hero or the principal character of the story ought to preach morals and ethics always. Because of this also, many contexts appear ridiculous.

(3) Descriptions for the description sake without any relevance to the context. Hanuman depicts Sita's breasts. The father-in-law describes the eye brows of his daughter-in-law. The elder brother depicts his pangs of desire before his younger brother! Needless to say how ridiculous all this is!

(4) Every scene must express some emotion (Rasa). The emotions of mercy, valour, sex and so on. They ought to be present irrespective of whether they are appropriate to a given scene.

These are some of the literary conventions found in this form of writing.

- *If we notice character portrayal, no character has a straight and clear direction. It is enough if we examine Rama, Ravana and Sita.*

RAMA: There is no connection between the poet's descriptions of Rama's qualities (character) and his actual behaviour. As Rama behaved hypocritically at the beginning itself for the sake of the kingdom, it becomes clear that his is not a good character right from the beginning. It is only the poet who says he acted as per the command of his father but Rama did not do it sincerely.

If we examine the value of 'following father's command' (*pitru vaakya paripaalana*) in isolation from this story and these characters, this is a value that emerged in the process of evolution of matriarchy into patriarchy. Even, *devotion or conjugal fidelity to the husband and chastity* of women is also such a value. Women must obey the slavery to their husbands and sons must obey the slavery to their fathers. The society of that time was not yet aware of the features, namely, wife and husband living with mutual love and affection and children loving their parents with respect.

The actual secret of the value of 'following father's command' is inheritance of property. The son inherits property through his father. The son, therefore, must obey the orders of the father. The sons who could say, "I do not want either your property or orders" were not yet born by that time. If the son does not follow the father's command, the father would not give his property to that son. Thus, owing to property, we have father's authority and son's slavery.

Take any value. If it is favourable to only one side, then it is not a justified value. There would not be a scope for real love in such a relationship.

The relationship between Dasaratha and Rama is a property relationship. The entire *Ramayana* is a story that included the property relations of the father and sons and hostilities between *races/tribes* for the sake of property.

However favourable Rama might be to the value of 'reverence to father' (*pitru bhakti*), he has been abusing his father whenever he faced difficulties. If a father's command is something that would give him total happiness, Rama should never feel sad either in respect of the kingdom or forest life. He should not utter a single word against his father. However, has the story proceeded so? No.

In case the poet did not write anywhere that Rama abused his father, can we assume that 'following his father's command' gave Rama a great pleasure? No. Commands never give pleasure. Even if the poet conceals this reality, it will come out in a different form.

If 'reverence to father' really gives happiness, every son must get that happiness naturally.

What about Lakshmana? This man has abused his father many times. He encouraged his brother to defy father and occupy the kingdom. Why does not this son have a vow of following father's command? He does not have it because he will not get father's property. As he will not get property from the father, he is not obliged to be obedient to his father.

Since Rama is the eldest son, he will be subservient to his father.

If the poet wants to show father's command as a value that really pleases sons, he has to delete many dozens of scenes from the story.

Is it enough? The same argument applies to the value of the devotion or conjugal fidelity to the husband and chastity of woman.

If the poet wants to show that devotion to the husband is a great value that pleases women, there should not be quarrels among rival wives (between Kausalya and Kaika) since it causes agony to the husband. Kausalya ought not say to her son thus, "Do as your brother said, (*Kill that old man!*) and occupy the kingdom my son!" Kausalya must not utter even a single word against Dasaratha and Sita must not utter a single word against Rama!

Why did all these scenes appear? What do these scenes tell us? They tell us that devotion to husband is not giving real happiness to those women. A relationship in which the rival wives are absent and in which slavery to the husband is absent give pleasure to the wife. However, such a relationship was not present at that time.

If the poet wanted to show Rama as a

genuine sage, Rama should not have carried weapons with him from his house while leaving for the exile. He should not have accepted any weapons which the gods gave him. He must not hunt and fight battles. No such scenes are relevant to sage hood.

If the poet wanted to show Rama as a truthful man, he should not accept the suggestion to have his coronation at the beginning. He should not have given his sandals to Bharata at Chitrakuta. He should ask Bharata to rule the kingdom. Even after the forest life, he should not accept the kingdom.

In this manner, if the poet wants to show that values like reverence to the father, commitment to truth and devotion to husband give pleasure, the story should not include behaviour that is contrary to those values. Then, only the names of those values will be meaningful. There will not be any story. If he wants the same story, it must proceed with these contradictory aspects and inconsistencies. It is an utter ignorance to assume that Valmiki wrote correctly before the poets of Interpolations.

All the problems of Rama are social. Property right, chastity of his wife, comforts in life, honour and reputation, glory of the dynasty, battles for the kingdom — everything is social! Even the sages do penances and pray to the god for riches, wealth, weapons, devoted wives and authority over the world — All are of the same sort.

Examine serially every scene beginning from Rama's readiness for the coronation until he sent Hanuman to threaten Bharata! Have you found nobility any where in him? While talking about 'following father's order', he abused his father in several ways. Every now and then, he suspected Lakshmana who had served him day and night! He suspected Sugriva! He suspected Sita! He subjected her to the test of fire. He suspected Bharata who had given up the kingdom for his sake. He believed that Bharata was not qualified to be a king and that he was greatly qualified. He became somewhat calm after 'ascending' the throne. However, we see the same attitude later. Again suspicion on his wife. Test again! He committed murders to sustain caste distinctions. He chose prosperous neighbouring countries, attacked them, destroyed people there and occupied all those kingdoms.

As the story, which the poet wanted to present as god's story, was connected with property rights and the plundering of other kingdoms, the poet handled the characters with his '*social-common-sense*'. Even if it is the character of Maha Vishnu, it has to revolve around property, weapons and self-interest!

Is this Rama an Ideal king?

Is this Rama's Rule an Ideal Rule?

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RAVANA: The poet simply glorifies Ravana as a warrior, scholar, well read man. However, he does not show any of these features. Ravana 'who destroys sacrifices' and 'who harasses sages' does not appear contrary to Vedic culture. (*There were Vedic scholars in Lanka. Sitting on a tree in Asoka vana, Hanuman listens to the Vedic recitations of Rakshasa Brahmins who performed rituals. When Vibhishana visited his brother's chamber, he sees Vedic Brahmins performing worship! The poet attributed his Vedic devotion to Ravana as well.*)

If we observe Ravana in the whole story, he appears to be a stupid fellow.

He does not make any attempts to drive away the enemy who had entered Janasthana.

When Hanuman comes and terrorises the whole of Lanka, Ravana lets the enemy leave happily. Moreover, he himself praises Rama's valour with reverence, "Rama is a great man... He will surely come to Lanka by drying up the sea."

As it is not possible to write the story as if Ravana agreed for the truce, the poet does not do so. However, without thinking whether it is proper on the part of Ravana, who has not agreed for a truce, to praise Rama, the poet makes Ravana eulogize Rama. All Rakshasas praise Rama!

Ravana lets off free his brother, who had become his enemy, to go and join the enemies. He lets off free the spies — who had praised his enemy — without punishing them.

Though facing major losses in the battle, he does not do any harm to Sita. Moreover, he keeps the wife of his brother — who had betrayed him — as a guard for Sita.

Thus, throughout the story, none of the actions of Ravana is in his favour. All are favourable to Rama. Whatever action of Ravana benefits Rama, the poet makes Ravana do that.

When Hanuman was caught, did Ravana have him killed? Or if he had Vibhishana killed? Or if he had Sita killed? Or if he had her nose and ears cut off? Any of these things would have caused a loss to Rama. This is why, none of these things happened.

In fact, the abduction of Sita by Ravana itself is for the benefit of Rama. Under this pretext he could invade Lanka.

As Sita's chastity should not be spoiled, a curse for Ravana.

"Ravana is a great man. He did not harass Sita. He did not cut off the nose and ears of Sita as Rama had of Surpanakha", say the devotees of Ravana.

However, it is not the intention of the poet to say that Ravana is a very great man. As Sita should not die or become ugly, the story proceeded as if Ravana did not do those acts.

Ravana's valour, handsomeness, wealth — every thing is for highlighting Rama's character.

According to the story, the principal character Rama is a great warrior. Therefore, his enemy who fights with him should be an equal. Hence Ravana is also a great warrior. Rama won fame that he had conquered such a warrior as Ravana.

As the riches and wealth of Ravana will belong to Rama's group at the end, Ravana has great wealth.

As the poet wants to say that Sita rejected Ravana, however handsome he might be, Ravana is handsome.

Lastly, even Ravana's death is also meant to glorify Rama.

"As he wanted to die at the hands of Rama, Ravana did not agree to a truce and fought the battle resolutely", saying so, the poet threw Ravana at the feet of Rama as his slave, even after Ravana's death.

This is Ravana's character at the hands of the poet.

SITA: Devotion or conjugal fidelity to husband is a hypocritical value. It makes the wife a slave of her husband. Self-respect and independence of women have no place in this value. (*Opposing conjugal fidelity to husband does not mean having several sexual relations is good for women. What we say is both men and women must have the same value. If a woman ought to have relationship only with her husband, a man also should have relationship only with his wife. Any value, if it is unilateral, is not a value at all.*)

The values, however contradictory they may be, will be assimilated into the lives of people if they are in vogue for a very long time. They become so influenced that people cherish those values and derive pleasure from them. Human psychology adapts to those values.

A woman would like to be subservient to her husband and behave as he desires.

Man would like to behave with authority over his wife.

Even though a person who is not free, here a woman, accepts the authority of her husband on many occasions, it is inevitable that she would oppose the authority at some moments. Conflict and hostility are inevitable in any relation between two people with unequal status. It is the same case between a wife and husband.

The married life of Sita and Rama is akin to that of other men and women in society. When Rama was not inclined to take Sita to the forest life, Sita says, "Do not worry that I will look at other men. I am not of that sort. I serve you alone." Keeping in view the usual suspicion which a husband might have toward his wife, Sita tries to dispel the fear of her husband.

Further, she also criticises Rama, "My father married me to an incapable fellow like you. Ignoring the responsibility to your wife you intend to hand her over to others." Thus, Sita speaks as carelessly as a woman who speaks to her husband who ignores her difficulties.

"While you are in the attire of a sage, why do you have these weapons? Why do you take vows to kill those who are not hostile to you?" Sita questions the deeds of her husband.

"You are a woman, shut up", Rama dismisses Sita's questions.

"What will happen to my husband if I die? He will live happily with other women without any dearth." She says so since she knew about men who live happily with other women after the death of their wives.

"Are all the virtues that I have practised so far to be in vain?" She thinks in retrospection during troubled times.

"Alas! You doubt me. Have you not recognized my character?", Sita asks complainingly. She submerges in deep depression as her sufferings and sacrifices have turned futile.

This sort of hostility, disbelief, jealousy, anger and conflict are inevitable between wives and husbands who have no opportunity to attain equal status.

It is the same whether it is *Enki* (common name of an illiterate, low caste woman in Telugu) and *Enkadu* (common name of an illiterate, low caste man).

It is the same whether it is Sita and Rama.

That characteristic feature is not present in Individuals.

The relationship that makes a husband superior and wife inferior itself has the nature that creates conflict.

In such a relationship as this, the wife cannot be happy. Even the husband cannot be happy in a relationship that gives scope to a conflict with the wife. This sort of contradictory relationship does not yield real friendship, love and unity between men and women.

As she is a great devoted wife according to the story, Sita says whatever she wants to say and then admits that it was her fault to talk like that. "Pardon me! As I was born as woman, I talked eccentrically and foolishly. Otherwise, am I qualified to criticise you?" says Sita.

However, conflict still remains in a woman, however much she becomes the slave of man. That conflict exists within the limits of the society in which she lives.

Sita's consciousness is also similar to that. Sita can recognise naturally that her husband has behaved harshly to her. As a result, she develops a kind of an aversion to her husband. However, that aversion is not so intense that she rejects and defies the husband. Instead of blaming the husband, she blames her bad luck.

At the end of the story, Sita goes into the crest of the earth. It does not mean that Sita rejected her husband and left with a sense of self-respect. It is not the intention of the poet to say that Sita defied Rama. In the story the poet says that Sita will be waiting for Rama in heaven.

Then, what is the reason for Sita going into the earth?

Out of the eleven thousand years for which Rama lives, ten thousand years had already passed before he abandoned Sita. Now the story has come to the last stage. The poet is withdrawing every character one after the other. First Sita has left for heaven. Then Lakshmana. Later all people along with Rama!

In the story of 'the *Poisonous Tree*', Sita commits suicide. It is not with an intention to defy the husband. Out of self-dejection, hopelessness, unrest and lack of interest to live with the husband. In this situation she committed suicide. The basis for showing this is that in Valmiki's story, Sita did not come back to Rama. Sita and Rama did not live together again. This is the basis for Sita's suicide in my story.

We should not criticise either Sita or any other woman from the same perspective with which we criticise Rama or any other man. The situation of Rama is different and the situation of Sita is different. Rama is the lord. Sita is a slave. In the context of man-woman relationship, we should have the same sympathy toward women, which we show towards slaves.

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Discussions on 'God' and 'Dharma'

Does god exist? Is there *karma*, the fruit of the past action? Is there destiny? Are there Dharma and Adharma? Has any one seen them, understood them? — The poet discusses these questions at many places in the story. However, at the end he does not say any thing new. He establishes the same old beliefs.

When Sumantra said, "I think there is no Dharma in reality", Rama frowned as if to say, "Stop! What do you talk?" Rama did not say what would be the result if one follows Dharma.

The character which raises the question, "Is there god?" after a while, without getting any reply, admits its ignorance, "I have asked so because of my ignorance."

Jabali's atheism belongs to this category. Jabali, who said that there were no other worlds, later admits that, "I have just spoken that way. I am not an atheist."

When Rama faints in the battle field, Lakshmana debates over 'Dharma' while wailing for his brother. Finally he says, "I said some thing, out of my sorrow!"

The doubt, which people raise during tough times, appears during the tough times of the characters in the story.

We do not find new answers to those doubts in the story. They do not even appear as doubts. Finally, the story concludes, "Why all these doubts? What more do we want than to follow our elders?" The essence of the debate is, "Debate is unnecessary'!

When a question arises, if we give up the question without searching for an answer, does it mean that the question has disappeared?

Once a question arose, it will remain so until it is answered. When there is a question, it will also have an answer. It is our duty to find out that answer.

Like Valmiki, we need not give up our questions without seeking answers. The knowledge about nature and society, which we know, is greater than that of Valmiki. We have clear-cut answers to our questions. We have seen them in the 'preface'.

Is *Ramayana* a beautiful poem?

Yes, it is a beautiful poem! For whom? For those who benefit from it! But it appears to be beautiful even to those who face hardship and loss due to it. Those who face humiliation due to it also revere it. Because, their consciousness is so backward.

To a society fallen in ignorance, all religious texts are beautiful.

But, what does 'beauty' actually mean?

Is the presence of forests, mountains, rivers, lakes, flower trees, peacocks, cuckoos, swans beauty? If a story takes place in such places, does that story become beautiful? At the time of sunset, on the bank of a river, amidst the twittering of birds, in the cool breeze, amidst the fragrance of freshly blossomed flowers, in the midst of green bushes, if a cruel fellow kills an infant child for jewels, will that story be beautiful? Will the beauty of the surroundings apply to the story? Or, will that story be beautiful if that infanticide is defended in poetic form with great slokas, similes, and compounds in the Sanskrit language?

Is the story beautiful, which is filled with desire for the throne, conspiracies, selfishness and the guise of false commitments? Is the story beautiful which cuts the nose, ears and breasts of women and insults them? Is the story beautiful which suspects the conjugal fidelity of the wife and drives her to perform the test with fire? Is the story beautiful, which sets fire to enemy cities and pushes women, infants and innocent people into fire? — What moral, what value, what act in this story is beautiful? If we thus question the aspects of this story what beauty do we find in it?

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[Translation: **B.R. Bapuji**]

Gods and Devotion

When a child is born, there isn't any thought in its brain. There isn't any influence on its mind. No beliefs are there. But, a society already exists around the child. The society will have some morals, some values, some habits, some beliefs — every thing ready. The child too grows daily in accordance with the way of life surrounding it and in accordance with the customs. The child would do whatever people around him do. He too believes whatever people around him believe in. No child grows beyond the influence of the society he is in.

The process of bringing up a child begins with a "Salute to God!" By the time the child slowly acquires some knowledge of examining things, it finds god within the house! God in the neighbor's house! God in the house opposite to the child's house! God in the neighbouring house of the opposite house! God in the opposite house of the neighbouring house! Further, god in the school! God in the books! God in the meetings! God in the films! God at the corner of the street! God on the top of the hill! God in the sky! In this blockade, the disease of god would become chronic by the time an individual asserts himself and comes to know about logical thinking. Many kinds of thoughts, logic and counter logic, wavering, conflict and finally surrender to god!

We read in many stories that devotion in the past was intended to seek heaven or piety. But no body would ask for heaven. They don't even think inside their heart. Not because they don't have belief in heaven and hell. However, they believe in them, worshipping god is not for that. They pray to gods in order to get what they want in life.

If a king prays to god, he desires to expand his empire and conquer his enemies. A trader wants to increase his trade and profits. These days, an unemployed person prays for a job. The mother of a girl stands in front of a stone or a rock and prays for a good matrimonial alliance for her daughter. The mother of a son wants more and more dowry and other formal gifts for her son. Those who live in rented houses and face many difficulties wish to build their own house some day. A patient with a chronic disease prays to god that he will pay his offerings if he gets cured of the disease. An employee wants promotion.

In this manner, people in both the rich class and the poor class pray for the satisfaction of their needs. All their needs or problems are connected with society.

As there is no god, there is no one to listen to or materialise these prayers. But the rich class can materialise its wishes. As long as people turn their faces toward, nonexistent gods, the wishes of the rich class are fulfilled.

The whole problem is that of the poor. If society creates opportunities of employment for all young men and women that there isn't any unemployment problem, will there be a situation whereby people need to pray to god for jobs? If society provides medical facilities appropriate for diseases and establishes hospitals that will treat the patient with care and responsibility, will there be any need for the patients to pray to gods? If people have scientific knowledge, they will bear with patience the diseases, which the medical science has not yet diagnosed. Likewise, the same solution is applicable to any problem. If this happens, people will be able to fulfill all their needs for which they are praying to god.

But the exploitative government encourages people to pray to god to fulfill their needs instead of providing knowledge to them. It is increasing the attraction for temples by increasing the transport facilities to *Tirupati*, silver linings to *Bhadrachalam* temple, and some other thing for temples at *Annavaram* and *Simhachalam*. Keeping the superstitious beliefs among people alive in tact is an important part of the administration of the exploitative government.

Religion that keeps people in ignorance is a big protective shield for the class of exploiters.

Usually we hear all the stories of gods through very melodious music and very pleasing songs. Even in films, songs about gods have very good tunes, voices, poetry and various combinations of musical instruments. We feel like listening to them again and again. Our desire to listen to that music and the joy that we get while listening to the songs — we consider all this as devotion. But, we go into ecstasy while listening to the songs not due to devotion but the comfort which the music gives. However hard core atheist one may be, one enjoys the lyrics of *Tyagaraju* and the ballets of *Kuchipudi*. When all the devotees assemble as a group and sing devotional songs, play on the harmoniums, drums and cymbals, they do not realise that they are deriving joy simply because of those songs. Whoever sings with enthusiasm is considered a great devotee. Ask any one to simply sit and derive so much enthusiasm, comfort and joy from devotion without singing a single song, without using the lute, drum, cymbals or any musical instrument and without deriving inspiration from those sounds!

From this, we can see three reasons that contribute to the formation of devotion for god. (1) Habit which people acquire right from the childhood due to the societal influence. (2) Assumption that god alone solves their problems and removes hardships. (3) Joy from singing and music.

In the course of debating on 'devotion', usually many people express the same doubt: "many great intellectuals, scholars, poets and highly educated people also believe in god! Even Mr. Gandhi…" This is the doubt! This is a very natural doubt. We have already explained the reasons a while ago. The same conditions work on every person. Whether it is Mr. Gandhi or Mr. X — all are persons who have been born and brought up in this society. However, some people, after they grow up and when they come to know how to think, may acquaint themselves with theories like rationalism and give up belief in god. But such people are very few in number. Those who do not change to atheism are large in number.

We don't find even a sample of rationalists among the poor. Because such knowledge is not accessible to them. They don't have education to acquire knowledge about nature.

Even if they have education. It is bourgeois education. It doesn't tell them about exploitative relations of labour. Moreover, it tells them all lies. Hence even the educated people do not know truth.

Further, those who are in business and exploitative politics do not at all allow 'logic' near them. They, in order to keep up their belief in god, deceive themselves and deceive other people. The same is the case with Mr. Gandhi. If Gandhi had suggested the solution of the 'repeated utterance of the name of Rama' (*Rama nama japam*) to lower caste people, we need not believe that all that happened was merely due to ignorance and without a selfish motive. He too preached the same stereotype sermons, which all the old scholars preached in order to keep people in ignorance. But with such silver linings as '*ahimsa*' (non-violence), '*Harijans*' (children of god Hari) and *Satyagraha* (Righteous indignation).

What is nature? What are its laws? Does god exist? If he exists, where? — To know such things as these, we have to depend on natural sciences. We cannot know anything by *putting the head below and feet above and leap like a cat*.

Theory that grasped the phenomenon of exploitation of labour and thoughts that are more developed than capitalism have arrived in the world. If we are still in a situation whereby we stand in a remote temple or sit under the feet of god-men and beg, "Will our son get a job? Wi ll we get a good crop in our field? Will the in-laws of our daughter take back our daughter to their home at least this month?" this means, neither natural sciences nor social sciences have reached us.

If poets trumpet that Lord Rama is the direct incarnation of Lord Vishnu and if we believe all that, and if we still eagerly wait for the *Rama Rajya* (Rama's kind of Rule) it is our ignorance.

Even the devotees do not know why we need this devotion and how it is useful to life.

Rama himself said in *Ramayana* that god is never seen.

Bharata also said, "When we don't know whether there is any result from penance or not, why should we waste our life like this?"

Many characters on many occasions in *Ramayana* have expressed many doubts concerning Rama. They have not found answers.

Sita and Rama keep worshipping trees and suchlike with a request to fulfill their wishes! Such are our gods! It is them we are worshipping to fulfill our wishes!

[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

Why should We Reject the Culture of the *Ramayana*?

People ought to reject the culture of the Ramayana because it is a culture that harms them. Because it is the culture of the class of the masters and the rich which accumulates properties and grabs state power by exploiting the people.

Observe whom does the Ramayana favour. The poor or the rich? The servants or the masters? 'Lower' castes or 'upper' castes? The people or the rulers? Superstitious beliefs or rational thinking? The freedom of women or male chauvinism? Now we know the answers to these questions.

The Ramayana is favourable to the rich and the masters. It is favourable to upaper castes. It is favourable to male chauvinism. It is favourable to the superstitious beliefs and autocratic rule. Viewed from any angle, it is favourable to the exploiting class, its ideas and culture. Hence, people must reject it.

If we view Ramayana from the perspective of people's interests, it is not progressive not only today but also during the period in which it was composed. Viewed from the interests of the people, it is always reactionary – then, now or any time.

The culture of Ramayana is synonymous with feudal culture in India. This culture is prevalent — directly or indirectly in all the social relations of people of India.

Knowledge of Nature is almost absent in feudal culture. Superstitious beliefs drive the lives of people. Distinctions of caste, religion and race that divide and split people and slavery of women are the features of this culture.

If we examine the story of the Ramayana, there is nothing that benefits the people. In this story, women believe that women are bad. People of the 'lower' castes believe that 'upper' castes are noble. The Vanaras and the Rakshasas 'admit' that they are wicked. Rama's family or dynasty is the greatest of all in the human kind. Within that Rama is the greatest of all!

It is the belief of the people that Rama was a great man and Ravana a wicked fellow. If abduction of Sita was a wicked act of Ravana, Rama's wickedness excels that of Ravana. Is killing of Vali not enough to conclude whether Rama was good or bad?

Sita came out of Ravana's confinement without any harm. Well, what had happened to Surpanakha at the hands of Rama? How could she get back her limbs? Was a man the greatest of all if he tortured a woman of a hostile tribe? Was Rama — who had become furious at Jabali when he uttered rational ideas and cooled down only when Jabali admitted that he was not an atheist — was such Rama a highly learned man?

What are the values and knowledge which people could learn from such a story as this?

What people ought to realise from this story is the following: Both Rama and Ravana were kings. Both were the representatives of the rich classes of those times. Both were autocratic. Both invaded other kingdoms and expanded their empires. There were class distinctions in their kingdoms. There were rich-poor distinctions. There were male domination and female subordination. There were prostitution, beggary, battles, killings and every thing. There was no difference in the nature of their rule. Therefore, the working classes need not praise either Rama or Ravana. For that matter, they need not praise any king.

Today the feudal culture and the capitalist culture have merged into one. Making money is the objective of capitalist culture. Both the cultures are essentially the same (exploitative in nature) with few minor differences. They do no good to people.

The objective of this culture is to prevent people from acquiring knowledge about Nature and Society and keep them in darkness. People ought to reject it in order to come out of this deception.

What will remain if we abandon the culture that existed for several hundreds and thousands of years? What sort of way of life will emerge? — What will remain if we get rid of chronic disease? We secure full health. If ill-health leaves us, we get full-health. If we get rid of hardships, we get comforts. If exploitative culture is eliminated, there emerges a culture that does not allow exploitation and which makes every one perform labour and all people have labour relations of equality.

Disappearance of exploitative culture does not imply disappearance of culture itself. The way of life that harms the people will vanish and there emerges a way of life that gives peace and joy to all. To build such a culture, people ought to destroy all kinds of exploitative culture. As the culture of Ramayana is a form of exploitative culture, we ought to reject it and abandon it!

We ought to acquire knowledge that does not allow superstitious beliefs like religions and gods and emancipates us from the exploitation of labour. ★

[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

Part 3

Some Critics of '*Ramayana*'

[There are 8 critics in this part]

Many people have criticised Valmiki's *Ramayana* from many angels. I think it is necessary to bring some of the important critiques to the notice of the readers. Here I take critiques of eight authors.

Some aspects of these critiques are progressive and some are reactionary. Some are biased with castes and some with races. Some are rational and some are anti-rational. Some do not have any connection with the original.

In order to ascertain what we should accept and on what aspects we should concentrate in these critiques, it is necessary to understand the nature of these critiques.

We ought to receive with gratitude those aspects of these critiques, which contribute to make people think and give them proper knowledge. We have to reject unhesitatingly those aspects which outwardly appear to be questioning the original but in spirit favourable to it.

By examining these various kinds of critiques, we have to learn how to understand a given kind of criticism. If a criticism is wrong, we should be able to grasp at once what is wrong in it.

1. Narla Venkateswararao's '*Jabali*'★

We have made some observations in the preface of this book (The *Poisonous Tree*). Here, we will see some more details.

Whoever studies *Ramayana*, whether that person is a devotee (theist) or an atheist — would invariably talk about Interpolations and attack the poets of Interpolations. According to such critics, if we want to identify the original *Ramayana* dropping the so called Interpolations, we need to divide *Ramayana* into four parts and discard three parts. Then, there will not be Rama's birth, Viswamitra's sacrifice, killing of Tataki, breaking of Siva's bow, marriage of Sita and Rama, golden deer, burning of Lanka, birth of Kusa and Lava. Above all, the most awful thing is that we will not have even the 'Rama Rajya' (Rama's Rule). Further, throughout the epic, hundreds of stories will have to be thrown out: Ahalya's curse, birth of Ganga, churning of the sea of milk, the heaven of Trisanku, battle between Viswamitra and Vasista and such other stories will be out. After deleting all the Interpolations in this manner, the 'actual story' that remains

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★ Venkateswararao, Narla. 1974. *Jabali*. (Play) Vijayawada: Navodaya Publishers.

will be, according to the critics, very great and beautiful without mistakes.

Is it true? Will there not be inconsistency and incoherence in the incidents that remain after deleting Interpolations? — No critic puts this question to himself.

There is no consensus among these critics regarding Interpolations. While one critic says 'golden deer' is an Interpolation, another critic would say 'golden deer is not an Interpolation but burning of Lanka' is an Interpolation. Some thing appears as an Interpolation for some while it is not so for others. Every one has his own logic.

See the question of Rama leading the life of a sage in the forest. No one will deny that Valmiki wrote this point. Are there no inconsistencies in this regard? In this story, none of the sages hunts. Why does Rama, who is expected to lead the life of a sage, hunt? Why did Dasaratha give so many weapons to Rama while leaving for the forest?

Instead of the condition that Rama ought to lead the life of a sage, if there was a condition that he should live like an ordinary person, it would not have been wrong on the part of Rama even if he hunted or waged battles. How do we react when Valmiki himself introduced hunting and battles into the life of a sage?

When a tiger, a lion or a Rakshasa abducts the wife, the husband cries with the pain of sexual desire. Instead of asking Jatayu who watched the abduction, the husband asks flowers, birds, hills and rivers to tell him the whereabouts of the wife. — If such scenes were not there, can we say every thing is consistent and coherent?

If there is any episode, which all people unanimously agree that is not an Interpolation, we find innumerable inconsistencies. The reason for these inconsistencies is in the very nature of the form of writing. The very theme is connected with the miracles of the god. Again all scenes involving the nine *Rasas* (the nine emotions: love or sex, courage, grief, credulity, humour, fear, terror and anger) must be present. It should include morals and values for the sake of people. It should include domination and servitude. It should include racial conflict, hostilities and plundering other kingdoms. How can any poet create such a story involving all these things without inconsistencies? Human society has not digested rationalism until today. Miracles, chants, astrology and such other things are still swaying the lives of the people. In the recent past, Sri Rama visited poet Potana's house and filled the lines of an incomplete poem. He went to Tanisha and got Ramadas released. While our lives and our writings are sunk deep in such unnatural mire even today, could Valmiki, who lived thousands of years ago, write with naturalness? What a blind admiration for Valmiki?

Mr. Narla Venkateswararao (hereafter Venkateswararao) comes under the category of devotees of Valmiki.

In the preface to his play *Jabali*, Venkateswararao discussed some Interpolations. Here, we shall see them in brief.

Was Lakshmana married?

It is Venkateswararao's opinion that according to Valmiki, Lakshmana was not married and all the references to his marriage are Interpolations.

In defence of his argument, he gave some reasons. Let us see his reasons and our arguments that show how wrong his reasons are.

(1) In the entire story, reference to Lakshmana's marriage is found in two places only. If it were Valmiki, he would not have done so. He would have mentioned Urmila in some more places. The fact that there is mention of Urmila at several places, Valmiki might not have written about Lakshmana's marriage. The poets of Interpolations talked about the marriage but they mentioned about Urmila, only at couple of places.

Answer: Together with Rama, the four brothers are of the same age. It is natural that the marriages of other brothers took place along with Rama's marriage. In *Ayodhya kanda*, which all people agree that there are no Interpolations, Sita mentions these marriages while talking to Anasuya. Why should we consider this as an Interpolation?

As Sita appears throughout the story and Urmila does not appear often, we should not infer that Rama was married and Lakshmana was unmarried. We have to look for the reason why the poet has not mentioned Urmila several times.

Whatever characters are more relevant for the story, they appear more frequently. They do not mention frequently those characters, which are not very much necessary for the story.

It would have been reasonable if the poet talked about Urmila at least while Lakshmana was leaving for the forest. Similarly, when Bharata decided to give away his kingdom to Rama, it would have been appropriate if the poet talked about Bharata's 'wives'. However, in the stories of ancient times, not everything proceeds so logically. Unless women are very much necessary for the story, the poet does not mention those characters. Why only women characters? How many times did the poet mention about Satrughna? Rama always hugs Bharata. Is there any mention of Satrughna on such occasions?

Since a given character does not appear at many places, should we dismiss the contexts in which it appears and assume that the poet did not write about this and some body added (Interpolated) it?

"If it were Valmiki, why doesn't he mention Urmila at many places?" they argue!

Then, why did another poet not mention that character at many times? Why did he mention only at two places? Why does a ***Gilmiki*** commit the mistake, which Valmiki did not do?

Suppose Valmiki mentioned only Rama's marriage and not mentioned others' marriages? Let us also suppose that another poet mentioned about others' marriages. It is very appropriate. We have to arrive at an opinion that the poet of Interpolation is more intelligent. We have to understand that another poet filled the gap, which Valmiki left out.

(2) Before leaving for the forest, Rama tells the maid servants about precautions for the protection of harems. If Lakshmana had a wife, he would have told the same to her. Therefore, Lakshmana did not have a wife.

Answer: If it were an ordinary householder, while going out, he would tell his wife thus, "Hey! I am going out. Close the door. Take care of the house!" However, Rama was a prince. He was a future king. Would such a person call his brother's wife and say, "O Lass! Take care of the house!" There would be officials for the protection of harems. They are also part of retinue (servants). We have to assume that Rama must have told this to such employees. As Urmila does not appear here, can we conclude that Lakshmana was not married?

(3) On one occasion, Sita refers to Lakshmana as a '*brahmachari*' (bachelor).

Answer: This word is not there in the edition that bears Valmiki's name. In other versions of *Ramayana* that bear Valmiki's name, it is mentioned that Sita used the word 'bachelor' referring to Lakshmana when Ravana came to Sita in the attire of a sage. Venkateswararao himself informed this. In Valmiki *Ramayana*, we find the word '*dharma chari*' (practitioner of dharma). Then should we take this version or that version? This means, we take that version which suits our arguments!

Even if we take the word 'brahmachari' (bachelor), it does not have only one meaning 'unmarried'. In Valmiki, there is also another meaning, 'One who has no relation with the wife at the moment but leading a systematic life.'

While talking to Sita in Asoka vana, Hanuman talks about Rama as follows: "He protects the four varnas (castes). He serves sages and Brahmins. He observes the vow of a bachelor."

Here bachelor means, one who is leading the life with certain restrictions. It does not mean 'unmarried person'. Similarly, we have to assume that Sita told Ravana about Lakshmana that he was leading the life of a bachelor.

However, Venkateswararao, ignoring the context, inferred the meaning of the 'brahmachari' as unmarried person and argued that Valmiki meant the same.

(4) When Surpanakha came to Rama, Rama said, 'My brother is without wife'. Does this mean that Lakshmana was not married?

Answer: Rama's words: 'My brother is without wife. He has no contact with woman for a long time.' This means, 'he has no wife with him at the moment'. Does it mean, 'My brother is unmarried?'

In case, we infer the meaning of Rama's words, as 'Lakshmana is not married', he might have said so as a joke. Both the brothers ridicule Surpanakha.

Lakshmana says to Surpanakha, 'O Woman with wide eyes! (Sarcasm), you be the younger wife of Rama. Sita is ugly. Aged woman. She has pot like belly. She is wicked. You are a mass of beauty.' All this is a joke.

Seeing this playfulness, should we arrive at the conclusion that Lakshmana was not married?

Since the poet did not mention Urmila frequently, if we ignore the contexts in which the poet mentioned and conclude them as 'Interpolations', will this be a great research?

Next to Rama, Ravana is an important character. How many times did the poet mention about Ravana's wives, except a couple of times.

The poet did not at all mention Sugriva's wife.

When Vasista narrated the lineage of Rama in Chitrakuta, he gave a long list of male ancestors only. Did he mention the wives of those men? Does this mean that Rama's grand fathers and great grand fathers were unmarried? Except when it is very necessary for the story, do we find the mention of mother's name in any story, when a child is born? Even if there is a mention of mothers, it comes only next to fathers. Since the place of a mother is somewhat superior to that of a wife in society, the poet occasionally tells about mothers also.

Let us keep aside the issue of mentioning wives. While narrating Rama's hardships, did the poet talk about Lakshmana? Rama wails that he is an unfortunate man for he left his mother. Has not Lakshmana also left his mother? Rama had his wife until recently (until Ravana abducted her). Lakshmana did not have his wife with him for so many years. Yet, did the poet describe Lakshmana's romantic separation from his wife? Why does he describe? Lakshmana is a slave of Rama. A servant. Why talk about the hardships of the servant? What feelings or emotions does a servant have? It is the duty of a servant to work day and night for the comfort of the master. Building of huts, fetching firewood, gathering cow dung from the forest and make firewood cakes with the dung. — These were Lakshmana's duties.

It is not necessary to think that the poet made a mistake if he did not mention wives and servants.

If we face a question, 'why did not the poet mention Urmila frequently?' we have to search for an answer as to why he did not mention. If we dismiss the context which tells that Lakshmana is married and say, 'Lakshmana is not married', is this an answer?

Venkateswararao concluded that it is the poets of Interpolation, who mentioned Urmila. Does a question not arise as to why the poets of Interpolation did not mention Urmila more than twice? Don't we need an answer for this?

Is 'burning of Lanka' an Interpolation?

'Yes, it is an Interpolation', says Venkateswararao. He showed two reasons in support of his argument.

(1) When he returned from Lanka and reported about his visit to Rama, Hanuman did not mention burning of Lanka. He did not mention any of his acts in Lanka.

(2) If Hanuman burnt down and destroyed Lanka, did Lanka return to normalcy within a month?

These two observations are incorrect.

(1) After he returned from Lanka, Hanuman reported everything including the burning of Lanka to Rama. He, however, first told about Sita and at the end, he told about the burning of Lanka.

What does Rama intend to know from Hanuman who returned from Lanka? He would like to know about Sita. Not about her well-being but about her character (chastity).

'Tell me, how is Sita towards me?'

Then Hanuman set all other things aside, talked about Sita first. Here the poet gave more importance to conveying that Sita was very pious and chaste. In response to Rama's enquiry, Hanuman began to say as follows: 'Searching for Sita, I crossed the sea. I saw Sita in Ravana's harem. (*Asoka vana is also part of the harem*). She was remembering you. She had disgust for Ravana and she was thinking of committing suicide. She had a lot of devotion for you. She was meditating for you fiercely. She had not abandoned the tradition. She had not neglected virtue. On hearing about you, she felt very happy. She lamented why you had not rescued her so far. I gave her courage that her husband would surely rescue her.' Hanuman paused. Reporting things is not yet over.

As burning of Lanka is not mentioned here, it is Venkateswararao's view that Valmiki did not write about it and there would have been a mention of it had Valmiki written it. (Hanuman also talked about it when there was a context.) Not only about burning of Lanka, Hanuman did not tell many things that happened at the beginning. Without telling about Mynaka, Surasa and Simhika, he said, 'searching for Sita, I crossed the sea.'

Without telling about killing Lankini and searching the whole of Lanka for Sita, he said, 'I saw Sita in the harem of Ravana.'

Thus, he ought to say the actual news quickly. Instead of telling quickly, does he leisurely go on describing obstructions of Mynaka, Surasa, Simhika and Lankini? If he tells all those things first, would not the poet face the criticism, 'He should find out news about Sita first. Why all other things? Why can't he tell those things later?' This is why the poet narrated news about Sita first and later reported about all things in Lanka.

Narrating all about Sita to Rama, Hanuman said, 'I instilled confidence in Sita that her husband would surely rescue her.' Hanuman did not say, 'I instilled confidence in her, crossed the sea and came back.' This means, he has not finished reporting.

On hearing about Sita, Rama wailed for a while and gave Hanuman a great gift. (*We know what that gift is!*) Later, he became little normal and asked, 'Tell me all the details of Lanka.'

Then Hanuman narrated all his great deeds. 'I have destroyed half of Lanka. I have demolished all the trenches. Burnt down entire Lanka. Killed many Rakshasas.'

Venkateswararao claimed that he read *Ramayana* many times. ".....You do not read *Ramayana*. Unlike you, I read it. Not once, twice or three times but read it repeatedly...." Even after reading repeatedly, he is arguing that Hanuman did not at all tell Rama any thing about Lanka. This is very surprising.

Not only here but at many places in the rest of the story, there are references to burning of Lanka.

While battle was going on in Lanka, Rakshasas woke up Kumbhakarna and told him, 'Get up quickly. The battle is going on. A Vanara came, burnt entire Lanka and left.'

When Rama stopped at Bharadwaja's hermitage while returning to Ayodhya after the battle, the sage felt happy and said, 'My boy! I heard everything that happened during your exile in forest. Abduction of Sita, your friendship with Sugriva....." While recalling what all he heard he mentioned the golden deer and burning of Lanka.

After his coronation and while praising Hanuman, (*You are such a great man. You did this. You did that.*), Rama mentioned burning of Lanka. Thus, we find its mention wherever necessary. While reference to Lakshmana's wife is an Interpolation because there is no frequent mention, burning of Lanka is also an

Interpolation despite its mention throughout the story! This means, according to Venkateswararao, there is no rule for something to become an Interpolation. An incident is an Interpolation whether it is mentioned or not.

(2) The second reason for Venkateswararao to argue that burning of Lanka is an Interpolation: 'Invasion against Lanka took place one month after Hanuman returned from Lanka. Then Lanka remained intact. Perhaps Ravana, by his miraculous power, might have restored the previous condition of Lanka which Hanuman turned into ashes!' This is Venkateswararao's objection.

If it were by miraculous power, why one month? One moment is enough!

A monkey, with the fire to its tail, flies over the city of Lanka and burns all the houses. — This is a myth. If he believed this 'myth' as real, can't he believe that the city has been restored in one month? What is this question, 'Has Lanka been restored to its original condition in one month?'

Burning of Lanka is the first myth.

Its restoration in a month is another myth.

There is coherence between the two myths. Then why questioning?

Venkateswararao did not raise a question on the first myth. He liked it well. He raised a question on the second myth. The question is, 'Has Lanka become normal in a month's time?' Therefore, he concluded that Valmiki did not write this incident and it is an Intepolation.

Is there any logic in this argument?

Is 'Bala kanda' an Interpolation?

'Stories in *Bala kanda* stand as hurdles for the forward movement of the story of *Ramayana*. If it were Valmiki, he would not have written such stories. This means, all such stories are Interpolations!' — Some critics hold this view. Venkateswararao also holds the same view.

See what he says, "Viswamitra's family background, his conflict with Vasista, story of emperor Sagara and his son, story of the birth of Ganga — will the pundits realize that all these stories in *Bala kanda* will in no way help the story of Rama to proceed forward? How is it wrong if I assume all these portions which hinder the movement of the story are Interpolations?"

Let us see whether it is wrong or not?

Viswamitra narrated all the stories in 'Bala kanda' while he was taking Rama and Lakshmana to his hermitage from Ayodhya and also while taking them to Mithila later. It is very natural that elders tell stories to young people while travelling in the forests.

'Story of Rama' means: telling about Rama's ancestors, about Rama's teacher, about the sacrifices that Rama's father performed and about Rama's birth. — Are these stories not connected with Rama's story? If these stories were not there, the poet would have to say, 'They started from Ayodhya and reached Viswamitra's hermitage' and 'They started from the hermitage to Mithila.' All along their journey, Rama sees some place or river and asks its details and Viswamitra narrates a story about it. How does this become a hurdle to the actual story? Teacher telling stories to disciples — Is this not a part of the actual story? Moreover, all these stories, in one way or the other, are connected to Rama. If all these stories — which were narrated during the journey — are Interpolations, it means the poets of Interpolations have brought glory to the forward movement of *Ramayana* story. If Valmiki did not write these stories, it means it did not strike to Valmiki to write such stories!

"How is it wrong if I consider all these portions that hinder the movement of the story as Interpolations?', asks Venkateswararao.

This is not one 'wrong' but two wrongs.

To assume that all these portions hinder the story to proceed — is the first wrong.

To assume whatever hinders the story is an Interpolation — is the second wrong.

If we objectively examined the matter without grudge against Interpolation and without reverence to Valmiki, this criticism would have been different.

Valmiki too was sensible at certain places and senseless at certain other place. Similarly, poets of Interpolations too acted both ways.

This will be clear if we examine some episodes in detail. However, it is unnecessary.

It is very wrong to decide certain episodes as Interpolations even if they are too inconsistent. The original poet also writes inconsistently on certain occasions. One scene tells about Sugriva's knowledge of the whole earth (Geography). According to this, Sugriva knew Ravana's residence. However, it proceeds as if Sugriva does not know about Ravana. By the time, Vanaras go in search of Sita in the direction of all the four corners, Sugriva tells about Ravana to those who go towards south. However, those who went to the south did not know where Ravana lived until Sampati told them.

Will not a question arise, "Sugriva has already told where Lanka is? Why should Sampati tell again?"

It is obligatory to conclude either this or that as an Interpolation. Can't we assume that although Sugriva informed, Sampati also told some more details.

However, it is not possible to connect like this every where. Even if it is not possible to connect, it is also not possible to conclude either of the two is an Interpolation. It is because the original form of the story itself gives scope for many inconsistencies.

Sugriva knows the entire Geography. He knows where Ravana lives. It is enough if he sends Vanaras in that particular direction. Why should he send in all directions? Even if he had sent people in all directions, why did he give the ring to those who go towards South? — Thus questions crop up at every step. Is any one of them an Interpolation? If we isolate Interpolations like this, the entire story will be an Interpolation. Then, the same (Interpolation) will become original! We need not assume that episodes which are not Interpolations were well written.

What would have happened if Lakshmana went for the golden deer? Any way, Lakshmana was drudging. If he undertook this work also, Rama would stay at home. Even if she heard Lakshmana's cries for help, Sita would not blame Rama and send him. Then how would Ravana abduct Sita? The story proceeded because Rama went for the deer.

According to the story, the purpose of Rama was to kill Ravana, wasn't it? Even if Ravana did not abduct Sita, there must be scope for the story to proceed in such a way that Rama would kill Ravana. However, Rama — who was born with a purpose of killing Ravana — was not aware where Ravana lived and his whereabouts — until passers-by told him. If the story proceeded this way — does this mean the poet narrated the story skilfully? Does it mean Valmiki wrote well at every step? That is not possible in that form. In mythological stories, unless some unexpected incident takes place, characters do not move forward.

Not only in the past but also in the present, the same thing is going on. In the present day society, which appears to have advanced in respect of arts, we are making many mistakes in our writings. Then, what is the meaning if we assume that a poet of several thousands of years ago wrote skilfully, naturally and beautifully? In a mythology, which is devoid of common sense, how can we expect well-developed form of writing? Therefore whenever critics want to catch hold of the poets of Interpolations, Valmiki is caught. All the poets (of Interpolation) hide behind him. All of them wrote following the same tradition. Leaving him, how is it fair to catch them?

The fact that a poet wrote a text called *Ramayana* and that some other poets expanded it is some thing that happened in history — whether we like it or not.

Weeding out all Interpolations from the Sanskrit *Ramayana* means rejecting the happenings in the history. Removing Interpolations from *Ramayana* is like not counting the period of couple of centuries during which the British ruled India. Whether it is good or bad we face the consequences of the history. We draw lessons from it. However, we cannot afford to ignore it and reject it.

If we insist on Valmiki *Ramayana* without Interpolations, it is possible only during the period of Valmiki. To insist on '*Ramayana* without Interpolations' means to say, "Let us go back to Valmiki's period. We do not want the subsequent period."

What an injustice to 'Jabali'!

Venkateswararao, who argues that justice will be done to Valmiki only if there are no Interpolations in *Ramayana*, picked up an episode — which he himself identified as an Interpolation — and wrote a play titled '**Jabali**'. (He explained his reason for doing so). We are not questioning why he wrote it. Taking an Interpolated episode is tantamount to accepting the place of Interpolation, isn't it?

Venkateswararao, who thought that poets of Interpolations had spoiled Rama's character, did injustice to the character of Jabali more than the poets of Interpolations did.

In *Ramayana*, Jabali spoke atheism for some time even in the presence of Vasista. However, Jabali in Venkateswararao's play has no courage to speak atheism. In his preface to 'Jabali', Venkateswararao said, "I think it is not inappropriate on my part to imagine that Jabali cannot speak in the presence of Vasista as fearlessly and unhesitatingly as he speaks in his absence since Vasista represents traditional religious beliefs and social customs.

Jabali in *Ramayana* spoke atheism for a while but as he is afraid of Rama's anger, he says, 'I am not an atheist'. In this way, Jabali of poets of Interpolations was a coward. However, Venkateswararao's attempt was to change that coward Jabali into a courageous Jabali. How is Venkateswararao's portrayal of that character? This Jabali can speak atheism boldly if it is behind the back of Vasista! However, he cannot speak fearlessly in the presence of Vasista! 'I do not think it is inappropriate to imagine this character like this', Venkateswararao claims that he has portrayed this Jabali well! Is this not more injustice to Jabali than what the poets of Interpolations did?

Did not Valmiki write '*Ramayana*'?

'Valmiki had orally composed the story of *Ramayana* but he did not himself put it in writing', says Venkateswararao.

"The epic-poem *Ramayana* which the great sage Valmiki uttered is very short. Here I use the word 'uttered' intentionally. He had not written. He uttered it as a song (poem)", says Venkateswararao. By this Venkateswararao meant that while Valmiki composed those slokas orally, some subsequent poets had scribbled them (in the name of Valmiki) on palm leaves.

Scholars say that there are at least 10 thousand slokas, which are in the name of Valmiki. Why did a person — who could compose so many thousands of slokas so beautifully — nor put them in writing? Should we assume that Valmiki was an illiterate? Is it possible for an illiterate to compose so many thousands of slokas in accordance with prosody and grammar? Is it possible to recite so many thousands of slokas orally? If Valmiki was a literate person, what must have been the reason for not writing on palm leaves the slokas, which he himself composed?

To this, Venkateswararao gave two reasons.

(1) At the beginning of 'Bala kanda' as well as in the '*phala sruti*' (Fruits of listening) at the end of 'Yuddha kanda', it is mentioned, 'This poem which great among great Valmiki wrote'... instead of 'I write this'. Therefore, Venkateswararao thinks some other poet scribed Valmiki's song.

However, in many *Satakas* (consisting of 100 poems) which we know today, we find the name of the poet in the last line of each poem. See '*Vemana satakam*'. We find 'listen, O Vema!' Does this mean that someone else other than Vemana had written it? In '*Sumati satakam*', we find the name Sumati at the end of every poem. In many *Thyagaraja*'s kritis (lyrics of Thyagaraja), we find the name Thyagaraja. What do these indicate? Poets composed their poetry in this manner until recently. (For example, Venkateswararao himself wrote some such poems and mentioned his surname 'Narla' in the last lines.) It is a kind of writing. This has been there traditionally. We have to understand that, although it was Valmiki who composed *Ramayana*, he must have written, 'One day, Valmiki saw pigeons near a river', instead of writing, 'I saw pigeons near the river'. If this is not a correct explanation, will it be correct to assume that some poet had scribed some thousands of slokas in the subsequent period?

See another reason, which Venkateswararao gives to show that Valmiki did not put slokas of *Ramayana* in writing.

(2) It was Kusa and Lava who first sang *Ramayana*, which Valmiki composed. This is why, for the word 'Kusilava', people give the meaning, 'one who roams around villages and sing valorous stories.' By the bye, dictionaries also give the meaning 'Valmiki' for 'Kusilava'.

Valmiki could have been a singer too. Does the expression, 'He used to sing' mean, 'one who does not write'? Roaming around villages, can't he sing the slokas, which he wrote?

Are these two reasons relevant to argue that Valmiki did not 'write' *Ramayana*?

According to Venkateswararao, the poet who composed so many thousands of slokas did not put them in writing. He has given reasons why he is assuming so. However he has not given reasons why Valmiki did not put them in writing. He must say, "I think Valmiki might be an illiterate. Hence he might not have written it." Or, he should give any other reason that he imagines. Without giving any such reason he said, 'Valmiki did not write'. He has not told us why Valmiki did not write.

Critics *who hang the swords* on Interpolations ought to understand another point.

If the entry of Interpolations into Valmiki's text were true, how long it must have taken place? It must have taken place until the introduction of printing machine. As others cannot introduce Interpolations into printed books, the activity of Interpolations must have ceased. Then, did the subsequent poets stop all their attempts? Did any subsequent poet not want to add new things into *Ramayana* or change old things? What, then, did such poets do? What they did was: They did not introduce Interpolations into the old story. They began to write new versions of *Ramayana*. Taking Valmiki's story as the basis, they started fabricating many things. This process is still going on.

If we now observe some other versions of *Ramayana*, we will come to know as to what had happened subsequent to the stage of Interpolations.

Some other versions of *Ramayana*

[I have not read any of these '*Ramayanas*'. I have read essays on these versions.]

In Bhaskara *Ramayana*: Tara curses Rama. Why did the poet make this change? This poet became aware that it would not look appropriate if Tara did not say anything to the man who killed her husband and saluted Rama (as Valmiki made her do so). (*Would a curse on Rama stand? The same poet must have converted that curse into a boon through some other sage!*)

In Sri Krishna *Ramayana*: The washer man who talked scandals against Sita Devi was summoned to the assembly and on an enquiry it was found that he was a mad man. When the priests advised Rama that there was no need not to care for a mad man's words and abandon Sita, Rama did not send her to the forests. There has been a criticism against Rama for he abandoned Sita in the forests. So, this change is meant to project him as a good man. However, Rama would have abandoned Sita if a sane person instead of an insane washerman spoke scandals. (*In Uttara kanda, it was not one individual who talked scandals. Spies say many people talked so.*) If no danger has to befall Rama due to any body, all the people in the country should go mad. Then whatever manner they speak, Rama need not give up Sita and kingdom.

Why did this poet make the change that it was a mad man who talked scandals about Sita? Why could not he write, 'He was sane? Yet Rama did not leave Sita'. Because the poet had no such courage. Both Valmiki and this poet said the same thing. However, some little change.

In this version of *Ramayana*, Rama makes Sambuka stop doing penance and does not kill him. It is the eagerness of this poet to make Rama above criticism and noble man.

The fact that Rama killed a Sudra does not appear reasonable to this changing society, does it? Therefore, this poet did not make Rama kill Sambuka, but like the old poets, this poet also does not like a Sudra doing penance. Therefore, he made him stop doing penance.

Rama will become a noble person to the extent the poet wishes. Tomorrow, when the society transforms into a higher consciousness, the attitude of these poets will change further. In the future *Ramayana*s, the poet makes Rama allow Sambuka to do penance. (*However, he would command Sambuka to do penance only for Vishnu!*). Then a new propaganda begins, 'Look! Rama treated all castes equally!'

In Adhyatma (spiritual) *Ramayana*: As soon as Rama is born, he exhibits his godly figure to Kausalya! While he was in forests, he hides real Sita in fire and keeps illusory (fake) Sita in the cottage! Ravana abducts Sita in order to die in the hands of Rama. Therefore, Rama wages the battle for the sake of fake Sita while real Sita is with him! This poet has such a brain!

In Adbhutottara (wonderful) *Ramayana*: While Rama rules the kingdom after killing Ravana, Rama goes to fight with another Rakshasa and is killed there! (*This is really wonderful!*) Then Sita fights and kills that Rakshasa. Meanwhile Brahma arrives and makes Rama regain life.

There have been many such changes and additions in hundreds of versions of *Ramayana* that appeared so far. After Interpolations stopped entering Valmiki *Ramayana*, these new versions of *Ramayana* began to emerge.

There are many myths not only in the texts, which great poets composed, but also among people. On the whole, all have the same objective. To glorify Rama! Glorifying the Dharmas (values) which Rama observed.

From these modifications and new versions of *Ramayana*, it is possible to know the changing conditions in society.

Let us suppose that the episode of breaking Siva's bow is an Interpolation. Here why the poet used the term 'Siva's bow' but not 'Vishnu's bow'? What do we know about this Interpolation? We have to imagine that there was hostility between the devotees of Vishnu and the devotees of Siva. Rama is the incarnation of Vishnu. Siva's bow is broken in the hands of Rama. This incident tells that Vishnu is greater than Siva.

Similarly, from the Interpolated portion in which Rama abuses Buddha, we can infer that atheistic ideas were prevalent among people due the influence of Buddhism and a propaganda suppressing atheism took place through *Ramayana*.

There may be many interpolations, which may not reveal the facts so explicitly. Yet, we do not lose any thing even if we do not gain from such Interpolations that do not reveal things so explicitly. Suppose we are unaware of an Interpolation and criticise Valmiki thus, 'Why did Valmiki write so inconsistently and incoherently?' Then we are criticising only the 'content' and the 'individual poet'. Our criticism applies to the poet whoever is responsible for that wrong (Interpolation). Even if we specifically refer to Valmiki as the author of those Interpolations, he will not be responsible for that criticism, if he did not compose it. Therefore, if it is necessary for us to criticise some thing, we need not hesitate, 'whether Valmiki wrote this or not. May be we are unjustly finding fault with him!' We have to criticise wherever it is necessary. As we do not know the name of the poet, we will use the name of Valmiki everywhere. Just because of this, injustice will not be done to him. Whichever poet committed that mistake, he will be responsible for that. It tantamounts to criticising that particular poet only. Therefore, if a question rises we have to look for an answer but should not suppress the question.

Arguments of those who say that there are no Interpolations in *Ramayana*

Gayatri mantra (a spell) has 24 letters. There are 24 thousand slokas in *Ramayana*! Every thousandth sloka after the first sloka begins with the first letter of Gayatri mantra. Therefore, the same poet composed the 24 thousand slokas! This is the argument.

Had every thousandth sloka really begun with the first letter in Gayatri mantra, this argument would have possessed some strength. It is only a claim and even pundits observed that not all slokas are like that. Yet the devotees of Valmiki *stubbornly stand* on the letters of their Gayatri mantra.

What is the difference between Valmiki *Ramayana* and the subsequent *Ramayana*s?

What is the difference between *Ramayana* that has Interpolations and the one that does not have Interpolations? What is the difference between the first *Ramayana* and the subsequent *Ramayanas*? No difference.

The theme of the story is the same in all *Ramayana*s. Rama is not entitled for the kingdom in any *Ramayana*. In all the stories, Rama ought to go to forests in exile. Rama spends his time abusing his father and younger mother. He makes friendship with Sugriva and Vibhishana using political tactics. He kills Ravana, keep his kingdom under his control and returns to his kingdom. This is the story whether given text has Interpolations or not. Whether it is old *Ramayana* or new *Ramayana*. Owing to Interpolations, the main story and its nature do not change. The poets of Interpolations might have created new incidents in the story but they have not imparted new character to the story. If we suppose that episode of Sambuka's murder by Rama is an Interpolation, its nature is not contrary to the nature of the incidents, which Valmiki created. Sin did not affect Dasaratha who killed a Sudra. It was Valmiki who wrote that according to rules and values of caste system, a Sudra is ineligible to do penance. *Ramayana* without Interpolations does not contain greater values than *Ramayana* with Interpolations. We should focus our attention not on whether there are Interpolations or not. It should be on the culture of *Ramayana*. How far the culture of the past has changed today? What forms have the past values assumed today? In what forms the past battles of the feudal society are continuing? Has their 'form' changed or 'nature' also changed? Is there any good that *Ramayana* can do to the society in either the past or present? What should be our attitude toward feudal literary texts like *Ramayana*? Our attention should be focussed on these issues.

People since past generation knew only that version of *Ramayana*, which included Interpolations. Therefore, our criticism will be on such *Ramayana*, which includes Interpolations.

We may see how funny it would be if we place before the people the story of *Ramayana* which does not include Interpolations.

See it in the form of a short story: Subbayya Pundit's '*Holy Ramayana*'.★

A short story:

Holy *Ramayana*

Subbayya Pundit wanted to prepare a text of real and holy *Ramayana* of Valmiki without Interpolations. He worked very hard day and night for six months and finished the work last midnight. He could not get sleep. He was eager to read it to some body. Subbayya Pundit has a long time wish to propagate *Ramayana* without Interpolations and create a dislike for Interpolations.

Venkanna, the washerman, came early in the morning before dawn broke, to collect clothes for washing at the tank.

Subbayya Pundit woke up very early in the morning and has been reciting Holy *Ramayana*, even without brushing the teeth and overwhelmed with joy. On seeing Venkanna, he felt extremely happy and said, "Venkanna! Come here! I will read *Ramayana*, will you listen?"

"Why not sir! What more do I need? Read it!" Venkanna came closer.

"Do you have any urgent work?"

"Nay, sir! What work do I have? I have to go to the tank to wash the clothes. That work will always be there. I can do it later." Venkanna squatted down.

"All right. It will be over soon."

Venkanna gaped his mouth in surprise as if asking, "How can *Ramayana* be over quickly?"

"Listen, I am starting. King Dasaratha decided to coronate Sri Rama...."

Venkanna turned pale with surprise. "What sir! Ramayya is not yet born. King Dasaratha has to do sacrifices, Kausalya Devi has to deliver, Vishnumurthi should assume the form of Rama, along with Lord Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, Satrughna...."

"Listen to what I say. Originally, a gentleman called Valmiki wrote like this only. He started from here only. Though that great man wrote in such a grand manner, do you know what the subsequent poets did? They wrote as they liked and mixed up every thing.... Valmiki did not write all those things, you know!"

"Is it not a good thing sir? They wrote every thing.... the birth of Lord Rama! How he became an adult."

"No, not like that.... If we write as we like, is it not betraying the original writer?"

"Sir, what is betrayal here?... Will coronation take place without the birth of Lord Rama?... The story teller must tell every thing in an order.... birth, growth and every thing. What is this starting from the middle, sir? *As if we started washing clothes in the after noon....*"

Subbayya Pundit felt worried. 'Why has it happened so at the very beginning? Why does this person insist on Rama's birth? Should I include sacrifice by Dasaratha and birth of Rama? Should 'Bala kanda' be there? Tut! Why should I care this washer man...."

"Continue to read it sir! Why have you stopped?"

"I will read it. But....", he started with a little hesitation.

Coronation is over and the narration came up to Rama's exile — All this in a fraction of a moment.

"What sir? Lord Rama.... What is that Rakshasi... Hell with my memory... Ah.... Yes... Tataki or some such name... Oh, what a strong Rakshasi she is.... She comes flying.... Lord Rama kills her.... He breaks the bow, mother Sita feels shy, brings a garland.... Read that marriage sir!"

"Valmiki did not write about that marriage"

"What? Is there no mention of marriage? If there is no mention of birth, it is okay. But don't you have the mention of marriage also? Why doesn't he write?... He must have written it.... Search for those papers which you might have kept some where! You will get them"

"First listen to me as I read it. Next time, I will read it for you as you want. First, listen this." Venkanna remained silent unhappily. Subbayya resumed. Rama is happy in Chitrakuta. He did not utter a single word against his father. He did not even use a single abuse against his younger mother Bharata brought his sandals. Rama went to Dandakaranya.

The story is proceeding with big leaps like a deer. There is no Viradha! No Kabandha! No Jatayu!

Subbayya Pundit has removed not only those Interpolations which earlier critics identified, but also some which he himself had identified.

"What about that guy.... He has his face in his stomach.... Looks very dark.... With hands like tree branches.... He grabs every thing and eats.... He drags Lord Rama also... Is he not there?"

"He is Kabandha. Later poets fabricated all that and defamed Valmiki. Fool! How can one have face in the belly?"

"What do we know sir? *We listen with our mouth open* when scholars like you tell us"

"You should not listen like that. You have to think whether you can believe it or not."

"Once our boy Apparao put many questions to that scholar who told these stories. That scholar shouted at him not to put such questions.... Sir! Now the days are bad. At that time... all strange things happened like this! Rakshasas knew mantras and miracles."

"All are stupid things. Illiterate people like you believe whatever others say. Valmiki did not write unbelievable wonders."

"What wonders? Did not Lord Rama kill Rakshasas?.... What is there not to believe? He cut Kabandha's hands and killed him." Saying so, Venkanna saw with a smiling face.

Subbayya Pundit felt that all his six-month labour has gone waste like *scented water thrown into ashes*. He was terribly upset. 'This fellow would have understood my greatness if he had some knowledge', Subbayya got angry with Venkanna. "You people do not have brains.... What is the use even if god has given you brains? You do not think even a little. You believe if some one says Dasaratha lived for thousands of years. You believe if they say Hanuman has a tail. You believe Ravana has ten heads....Ugh! You people do not have sense...."

Venkanna felt slighted a little bit. Also, felt shy. With some humility, he said, "How do we know? Are we literate? We listen when people like you tell things. I have been hearing since my childhood that lord Rama was born.... grew up.... and killed Rakshasas.... The story that you narrate is very strange!"

Subbayya faced a very difficult question. "Will all people say like this? No. why do they say so? Why should I bother about this illiterate fellow? Fool. He is so illiterate that we *cannot find even a single letter if we tear his stomach*. What if he accepts or does not accept?"

"Madam! Throw the clothes. I will bundle them to carry", Venkanna asked Subbayya's wife in a loud voice and was about to rise.

Subbayya is worried. "Sit down! Sit down! Why are you in such a hurry? You said you don't have work?"

"Why isn't there any work?.... ***She*** will alone have to work."

"All right! You can go later. You can take a piece of tobacco while going. Sit for a while."

Venkanna widened his face with happiness and sat down.

Subbayya Pundit felt depressed, 'Should I give bribe for listening Holy *Ramayana*?'

"How far have we come in the story?... Yes.... Sri Rama was facing troubles...Then Surpanakha came.... Rama punished her and sent her away...."

"That means.... He asked Lakshmana swami to cut her nose and ears. Is it not sir?" Venkanna looked doubting if this incident also has changed.

Subbayya Pundit felt uncomfortable. As some poets skilfully changed incidents that would bring disrepute to Sri Rama, he too thought seriously to change the episode of Surpanakha. 'Sri Rama is a merciful man. Would he torture a woman like that? Did he write like this? — No, Valmiki must have not written so. It must be surely an Interpolation." Subbayya Pundit concluded. This is why he simply wrote, "Rama punished Surpanakha and let her go!" However, he has not made it clear as to what Rama had actually done. When he wrote this, he appreciated himself for his shrewdness.

"Here, Lord Rama made a small mistake sir. It would have been enough if he had given her couple of kicks and sent her away..... He ordered Lakshmana to cut her nose and ears and spoiled her beauty.... After all, she is a girl. Should her husband like her or not?

"Valmiki in fact did not write like this."

"Yes, sir!"

"Do you know how much the later poets fabricated?"

"Yes sir!"

"Do you believe if Sri Rama did such cruel deeds?"

"Yes sir! How can we say sir? However intelligent one may be, he may commit mistakes....Also..."

"What is it? Ask. Don't hesitate."

"If you give me a piece of tobacco, I will go. Still lot of ....."

Subbayya remained unperturbed and said serenely. "Why so hurry? Always worried about washing of the clothes? Don't you need piety?"

"How is it possible sir? We do not get food unless we work?"

"You scoundrel! What do you lose if you sit for a while and listen to Sri Rama's story? Isn't your wife already there in the tank?

"***She*** has back ache since last night. ***She*** went there with great difficulty: moaning and sighing. I told her I would get Pantulu's clothes and came here."

"All right! You can go later. Sit for half an hour.... It will be over. I will read it rapidly.... Where have we come?.... About Surpanakha? She went to her brother wailing. Ravana got angry and went to Dandakaranya. He hid himself amidst the trees near Rama's cottage. He was watching when Rama and Lakshmana went out...."

"What? Wasn't golden deer there?" Venkanna asked with surprise.

Subbayya was not bold enough to say 'no'. "You know.... In fact...."

"Stop it sir!... How could Valmiki write like this? It is shameful!... That deer.... how lovely it jumps here and there?.... Mother Sita believes its tricks.. and asks Rama to get it. Then Lord Rama goes out, doesn't he?"

"Does he otherwise not go out? Doesn't he go out for hunting ?"

"Even if he goes for hunting? If Maricha wasn't there.... would such a tragedy take place?"

"What you said is right! Why should I disagree with you?... First, listen this. I will write it later....."

"What? Will you write again? Everything was there before?"

"Haven't I told you that Valmiki did not write all that... that's why, I will take opinions and ....."

"Why my opinions sir? Every body has the same opinion. Only Valmiki's views are crazy"

Anger and sadness over took Subbayya. He was shocked as if unimaginable danger befell him. 'Hereafter, will every one react like this if I read this 'Holy *Ramayana*' to them? I was thinking to publish this even by borrowing some loan?'

Venkanna got up and was quickly bundling the clothes in the veranda.

Subbayya Pundit held the manuscript in his hand and came into the veranda.

Thinking that Venkanna might be interested, Subbayya began to narrate the scene of Hanuman starting for Lanka.

Venkanna really felt happy and squatted down. Hanuman talked to Sita, took leave from her and crossed the sea very gently.

Venkanna was shocked, "What about burning of Lanka?"

"I know that you will ask...." Subbayya smiled, gathering courage.

"What? Even burning of Lanka is also not there? What sort of man this Valmiki is? So, he does not know how to write! Our 'Appigadu' writes so well... even while writing a letter he creates things and writes very well. How beautifully one should write when it is Rama's story?" Venkanna got very angry. He tied the bundle of clothes.

"Hey! Venkanna! If you leave while listening Rama's story.... Hanuman will punish you, be careful...."

Venkanna really felt frightened. "No sir! It is already late. I will listen to it after some time.... Mother promise!...."

Subbayya Pundit felt ashamed. Tut! Why should I compel him to listen? He will listen if he likes. Otherwise, he will go away. "All right! Get away fool. Get away! Anyway, you can not grasp these things. Go away!"

Venkanna still has fear for Hanuman. "I will sit for some time. Tell the story of Kusa and Lava. I will go after listening to it.

Subbayya got wild, "Why don't you understand? Get out! Go and do your work!"

"Are there no Kusa and Lava? What a great Valmiki he is? Is he not educated?.... How can he write if he does not have education. What is this? A stupid fellow like me also knows what is good and what is bad. '*A washerman is better than an educated man*', people say. Perhaps because of such people as Valmiki. Sir, you told the story to me. Do not tell this to others any where!.... It is enough!" Venkanna lifted a big bundle on his shoulders and crossed Subbayya Pundit's house.

Subbayya Pundit was completely lost in thought. He thought he might retain couple of Interpolations if it is necessary. Again he thought, 'How is it possible? If I do so, what will happen to sanctity of *Ramayana*?.... Why should I bother about this stupid fellow? Is he literate? If I gather some pundits and read to them, will they not say, "Excellent!".... Now I remember... Let me read it to Mr. Adiseshayya. He is an enlightened man. Very cool person.... Early in the morning... I relied on this fellow... Otherwise...."

Without delaying even for one moment, he held holy *Ramayana* in his arm pit and started to Adiseshayya's house, forgetting that he did not even brush his teeth.

Adiseshayya is a follower of Gandhi. He was in jail on many occasions.

By the time Subbayya Pundit reached Adiseshayya's house, he had just finished his worship, sat in the folding chair with coarse cloth, calmly *like Buddha under the Bodhi tree* and was looking into the newspaper.

"Come on sir! Come on sir! Mr. Subbayya!", he invited Subbayya with great joy.

Subbayya was overwhelmed with joy and asked him with humility, "Sir!.... I hope you are not in a hurry!"

"No... Please tell me"

"As I have some work with you, I came to see you.... Only last night, I finished Holy *Ramayana*. I thought of reading it to you...."

"Why not? I will listen surely. Please sit down.... What Interpolations have you deleted?"

As he does not want to say at the very first moment, Subbayya said with shrewdness, "Lot of husk has gone. Unless they want to defame Valmiki, every fellow *puts his finger* in *Ramayana*. In fact three fourths are Interpolations."

"I see! You have done a good thing. You may start after drinking water. First read, '*Rama Rajya*' (Rama's Rule) once. Later I will listen to the whole thing from the beginning."

Thunder fell on Subbayya's *heart*. "Sir! Entire *Uttara kanda* is an interpolation. I have not included any Interpolations, sir!"

"Have you also deleted Rama Rajya?"

Subbayya smiled with fear and hesitation. "How can we avoid deleting it sir?"

"What? Deleting Rama Rajya?"

Subbayya *swallowed his own saliva*.

Adiseshayya became excited with emotion.

"What did Mr. Gandhi teach us? Did he not want to establish Rama's rule in India?...If you say Rama's rule is also an Interpolation....."

"You have to forgive me. It is an Interpolation, sir! I am not the only person who is saying so. All the pundits have unanimously agreed..."

"So what? How does it affect Rama's story? How can *Ramayana* become a holy text if it does not include 'Rama Rajya'? Why did not Valmiki write about Rama ruling the kingdom? I cannot pardon Valmiki in this matter."

"If you.... coolly hear...." Subbayya looked from side to side, lowered his voice and said, "Between you and me. We should not talk in public... There is nothing great in Rama's rule... Its absence in *Ramayana* is... very... for Rama's fame....."

"What? Isn't there anything great in Rama's rule? Rama had ruled so well that even a dog got justice....."

"Alas! In fact there is no mention of dog or fox in the original story sir!"

"If it is not there, you include it! What fame to Rama if he did justice to a dog! Tell me, whether it is fame or shame?"

Subbayya Pundit got angry a little. As the saying goes, 'When I complained my grievance to the king, he asked his men to give me two more kicks!' This is like that. This man is asking me to include some more Interpolations.

"When Rama Rajya itself is an Interpolation, should I include another Interpolation within the Interpolation? Does a dog speak? Why do we need to talk about the dog sir?"

"Tell me any number of things. You must retain Rama Rajya!"

"If you ask me to keep Rama Rajya, another person will ask me to retain another thing. Finally, we have to retain every thing"

"Retain if necessary! What danger will befall?" Adiseshayya got up from his *Khaddar* chair.

Subbayya Pundit collapsed, "Alas! You know every thing. If you too say like this...."

Adiseshayya did not hear any more. Wearing Khaddar clothes he shouted, "My child, Rama Rajya Lakshmi! Get some butter milk for Mr. Subbayya Pundit."

Subbayya Pundit is *drowned in the stream of disappointment.*

Adiseshayya said harshly, "Sir! I will listen on another occasion. Now, it is not possible..... If you add Rama Rajya and get it...."

"Pardon me.... I cannot do that. I will never betray Valmiki."

"Then, will you betray Rama? Will you see Rama's face or Valmiki's face?"

Subbayya Pundit without answering and without looking at the face of Rama Rajya Lakshmi who brought butter milk, went out.

He was walking along the street. The sun was exactly over the head.

As he heard some songs about Rama, he stopped suddenly. Story-recital was going on at a distance. People gathered in good numbers. They were listening with ecstasy. Also washerman Venkanna in a corner.....!

Subbayya Pundit's blood boiled with anger. Bloody fellow!.... He came running here under the pretext of going to washerman's tank. Is this what he is doing? "Throwing the bundle of clothes, have you sat here?" he shouted.

"Need not worry sir! Anjaneya will watch the bundle."

"Thank god! You have not said, he would wash them as well. It is already midday, when will you go to the tank for washing? We need all the blankets by the evening, do you know?

"Well... I forgot the time. It will not take much time. I will get the clothes in no time.... How beautifully he is telling sir? If Valmiki heard this, would he move from here? He would appreciate the writer of the story.... Saying so, Venkanna was in a hurry to listen the story. "I will get your clothes by the evening, you can go......", he said irritably and turned his face away.

'Holy *Ramayana*' in the arm pit of Subbayya Pundit.... soaking in the sweat!

Will Venkanna accept 'The *Poisonous Tree*'?

Now a question jumps upon '*The Poisonous Tree*' like a tiger. People — who do not accept deletion of some episodes in *Ramayana* — how can they accept if you make it '*Poisonous Tree*'?

But, the nature of the two is not the same.

What the argument against Interpolation does is: It tries to eliminate many things from the story which people know and wipe out people's memories. It is not possible unless all people are insane. Owing to this change, except losing joy they do not get any good. When they do not have any new benefit from *Ramayana* without Interpolations, they do not find any need to lose the earlier joy.

But what *the Poisonous Tree* does is not that. The *Poisonous Tree* does not try to wipe out the story which is familiar to people.

It retains all the incidents as they are and makes its criticism of those incidents. It asks its readers to think whether the criticism is reasonable or not. If the criticism, which the *Poisonous Tree* makes, appears reasonable, then the readers will change the devotion and belief, which they have in *Ramayana* so far. Without waiting for the mercy of gods and for Rama Rajya, they will realise that the path of their liberation is in their hands. If a criticism that tells 'old path is useless' can also show a new and useful path, people will not remain without turning their heads towards that new path. If a logical thinking begins, people will themselves realise all religious texts like *Ramayana* are *Poisonous Tree*s and they will not do any good to people.

Reading *Ramayana* as a mythological story and a literature of ancient times is one thing and adoring it with devotion and reverence is another thing. If people understand as to which classes *Ramayana* does good, they will stop doing the second thing, even if they continue doing the first thing.

If Venkanna, who stopped work at the waterman's tank and squatted at a *Puranic* gathering, understands about classes, and literature that the exploiting class creates, then he will not stop before any Puranic gatherings. Venkanna who realises this point will not differ with *Ramayana, the Poisonous Tree*. He will correctly realise that nobody is making that book as *Poisonous Tree*; its own character is making it so.

Just because somebody gives *Ramayana*, a great name like '*Kalpa Vruksham*' (Wishing tree in the Hindu paradise) or *Amrita Bhandam* ('Pot of Nectar'), its character does not change. It is a *Poisonous Tree* for labouring people including women.

In the beginning, it is very difficult to people to reverse their devotion, which they have for *Ramayana* since the past. But in the wake of new ideas that explain their welfare and peace, the ideas of devotion will become ineffective. Gradually they give place to new useful ideas and stand aside. Therefore, the answer for the question, 'Will people tolerate if a writer characterises *Ramayana* as *Poisonous Tree*?' is 'Not only they tolerate, but also they themselves will describe *Ramayana*, as a *Poisonous Tree*!

In fact, the writer and the people are not two different entities. The writer is also part of the people. This means, the process of treating *Ramayana* as *Poisonous Tree* has already begun among people, hasn't it? ★

[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

2. Kodavatiganti Kutumbarao's 'Another *Ramayana*'

Is *Ramayana* not 'literature'?

When the first volume of *Ramayana* Vishavruksham came out, Mr. Kodavatiganti Kutumbarao (hereafter Kutumbarao) wrote a review. (*Andhra Jyoti* weekly, dated 27-12-1974). In that review, he commented, "To study Social Anthropology, *Ramayana* is not an appropriate text. In my view, it is useless not only as literature but also for sociological analysis."

This means, in Kutumbarao's view, *Ramayana* is not at all literature. For this he showed three reasons. (1) There are many Interpolations in it. (2) Many contexts in it are not coherent with each other due to either Interpolations or inconsistencies in the original text. (3) Portrayal of characters in *Ramayana* is not at all good. — These are the reasons.

I gave a rejoinder (in Andhra Jyoti weekly, dated 24-1-1975) to his review.

In response to my rejoinder, Kutumbarao wrote a reply (31-1-1975), in which he said, "I still feel that *Ramayana* is not useful to analyse evolution of society."

Here we need to arrive at an understanding. Is *Ramayana* literature or not? Is it of any use to understand society of that time? My views on this question are briefly as follows: *Ramayana* is literature. It is literature of the past. In that story, relations and characteristics of human beings of past society certainly appear. Based on that, we can understand things to whatever extent possible.

Now, let us see these views in detail.

What exactly does social analysis mean? It is examining society. If we are able to see economic, political and cultural relations in the society that appears in a given story, it means that story is useful at least to some extent to examine the society of that time.

However, not every one analyses society in the same manner. A given analysis depends on the conceptions of society and nature, which the analyst has.

If devotees of god read *Ramayana*, society of that time appears wonderful. They will believe that people under the rule of Dasaratha, Rama and Bharata were wallowing in pleasures and happiness and every body went to heaven. Because they view the story with devotion!

If atheists read the same story, the contents of the story, namely, heaven and hell, sin and piety, boons and curse appear unnatural. People appear to be foolish. More than this, they will find nothing in that story.

If Marxists read the same story, they will find class distinctions. They will see rich-poor distinctions. They will observe exploitation of labour, master hood and servitude in human relations. They understand imperial designs in Rama's battles. They will see slavery of women in Sita's devotion to her husband. They conclude how deep rooted the domination of exploiting class and its state.

The way in which people understand a stage or a text in a society depends on the conceptions they hold.

Labour relations among human beings are the basis for any society. Take any period in history, depending on whether exploitation of labour exists at a given point of time, we find the characteristics of a given society. Looking at those characteristics, we can understand the basis of that society.

★ Kutumbarao, Kodavatiganti. 1974. *Maro Ramayanam.* (A review), Andhra Jyoti weekly, dated 27-12-1974.

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When we analyse a stage in the history, we need to know its beginning, development, its changes and the causes for the changes and so on. However, when we examine a story and a character, it may or may not be possible for us to understand the basis of the society. However, even such text will indicate some features of that society. We do not find any text that does not indicate any social features. Even in the words 'heaven and hell', we find features of human society only.

When we analyse a text (whether it is ancient or modern) we have to first examine its content. We have to see 'to which social classes or groups its content is favourable or unfavourable'. To view a text like this means examining its content. Next, we have to see the *form* (manner of writing). Generally, the form will be in accordance with the content. (There may be differences among the writing abilities or skills of the writers. And this is a different question.)

The whole story of *Ramayana* is the story of 'god'. When we speak of 'god', it is a big miracle. If we tell stories of god like those of ordinary human beings, it will not be the story of the god. Since *Ramayana* is the story of a god, it is in the form of mythology. Yet, we can find social essence in those miracles. This is important for those who analyse.

Lunacharsky, a Russian Marxist and literary critic, observes as follows:

"In a general analysis of an epoch, for example, the Marxist critic must strive to give a complete picture of the entire social development of that epoch. When one single writer or work is being discussed, there is no essential need for an analysis of the basic economic conditions….. only to an extremely insignificant extent do artistic works depend directly upon the forms of production in a given society. They depend on them through such **intermediate links** as the class structure of society and the class psychology which has formed as a result of class interests." (p. 11)

"The Marxist critic takes first of all as the object of his analysis the **content** of the work, the **social essence** which it embodies. He determines its connection with this or that social group and the influence which the impact of the work can have on social life; and then he turns to the form, primarily from the point of view of explaining how this form fulfils its aims, that is, serves to make the work as expressive and convincing as possible" (p.13). (Lunacharsky, A. 1928. *Theses on the Problems of Marxist Criticism.* In 'On Literature and Art'. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1973. pp. 9-21)

Kutumbarao argued that *Ramayana* is not at all literature and it is useless for analysis. The reasons that he pointed out are that it lacks consistency, sense of context and proper portrayal of characters. This means, Kutumbarao is looking at not the content but the form of the text.

That form, however, is appropriate to the content. Mythological literature that tells about god's miracles will have such defects. How can a story of gods be without inconsistency and without lack of sense of context? It is natural that literature in its childhood contains such inconsistencies.

Let us now see objections of Kutumbarao in an order.

1. He said there are Interpolations in *Ramayana*. That is why it is not suitable for an analysis. Referring to Viradha's story, he concluded that his curse is an Interpolation.

See what is the theme in this episode. Viradha was originally a Gandharva called Tumbura. He used to be a servant of Kubera. Once Kubera cursed Tumbura to turn into a Rakshasa. Do you know why? Because that servant did not serve him in time! Later when Tumbura begged his master, the master told him when he would be relieved of the curse thus, "When Sri Rama kills you in a battle, you will be relieved of the curse and reach heaven."

Since then Tumbura has been a Rakshasa.

Viradha reported all this to Rama. Then, he said, "Bury my body in a ditch. It is the custom of Rakshasas to bury the body of a man after he dies." — This is the story. From this, certain things are evident.

(1) A master imposed a severe punishment on his servant for not serving him with humility and obedience. This story is useful to keep Sudras in fear and respect for their master and to make them believe that they will be born as Rakshasas if they do not serve obediently. How does it matter even if this curse is an Interpolation? This gives us lot of scope for analysing society. How will it be useless for an analysis just because it is an Interpolation?

(2) The poet showed Viradha the salvation from the curse through Rama. He glorified Rama as god by saying, 'Whomever Rama kills, he will attain heaven. It is a great fortune to die in the hands of Rama."

(3) There was no practice of cremation in the Rakshasa race. Burial had been an age-old custom.

In this stupid story, which appeals like a cock and bull story, we can see master-servant relationship. It appears that there was hostility between Rama's race and Rakshasa race. We find a custom (of burying dead bodies) in Rakshasa race. If we are inclined to understand things, we will know so many things.

At a later point of time, Rama kills another Rakshasa called Kabandha. This Rakshasa prays to Rama a lot. 'Cremate my body! I will be relieved from the curse only if you cremate me. Then I will tell you an important thing. You have to cremate my body.'

While Viradha asks for the burial of his dead body, Kabandha asks for cremation. What do we know from these stories? Do they cremate or bury in Rakshasa race? It is evident from this that custom of burial was in the past and in the subsequent period, it changed into the custom of cremation. Let us consider these stories as Interpolations. Whether these are Interpolations or not, are we able to know certain things from them or not?

See another Interpolation in *Ramayana*! Some scholars say, entire *Uttara kanda* is an Interpolation. We have the story of Sambuka in *Uttara kanda*. He is a Sudra. This Sudra fights for the equal rights with Brahmins and faces death punishment. Although this story is an Interpolation, are we able to know or not the conditions of that society from this Interpolation?

Kutumbarao says that for social analysis, *Ramayana* is not useful but Bhaarata (*Maha Bharata*) is! There is an argument that there are Interpolations in Bharata also. When *Ramayana* ceases to be literature due to Interpolations, how can Bhaarata, which is placed in similar situation with regard to Interpolations, be separated?

2. Giving an example for the inconsistencies in *Ramayana*, Kutumbarao argues that two contexts, which tell the ages of Rama and Sita, are incoherent. If they are not coherent, it is a matter connected with the 'form' of writing. Nothing in the story changes due to this incoherence. If we cannot exactly determine Sita's age, is it not possible to understand the values of chastity and devotion of women to their husband? Had their ages been consistent, would *Ramayana* have become literature?

If the nature of the characters, their values and the nature of society depend on these calculations of age, one can break his head. Many critics conduct great debates on the ages of Rama and Sita (on curly hair Krishna and moustache of Arjuna) as if these calculations of ages are crucial to the entire Ramayana. Debates on certain issues are utterly irrelevant except to divert the thinking process of the people.

Let there be any number of inconsistencies, they do not come in our way to understand society as depicted in society.

3. Another objection of Kutumbarao. 'Portrayal of characters in *Ramayana* is not good.' Yes, it is not good. It is so because it is a mythological story. While admitting that *Ramayana* is the very first epic-poem, he has not looked for reasons for the bad portrayal of characters at the very beginning of emergence of poems (that is when literature first emerged).

It was the stage of childhood. Without this stage, would literature be free from inconsistencies; would its character portrayal be good and highly developed?

As soon as they are born, will the human beings be like grown ups that run without taking childish steps and like intellectuals? Are the children, who do not walk properly, not human beings? They are human beings. They are children. They have to grow further. Similarly stories that take wrong steps in the childhood are also literature. They have to develop to a higher level with artistic values and without contradictions in character portrayal. However, before they reach such a higher stage, all the stories with inconsistencies will also be part of literature. They constitute mythological literature. To be so is its character.

While indicating the reason for all literature to begin as mythology in the beginning stage of art and literature, Marx said that "Immature social conditions" gave rise to such literature. Human beings at that time were unaware of Nature and social relations. Their unconsciousness or unawareness is reflected in their arts.

Sometimes, the sun and the moon suddenly disappear. Why? Because of eclipses. When earth comes between the sun and the moon, the sun rays do not fall on the moon and as a result moon does not appear to those on the earth. This is eclipse of the moon! When the moon comes between the earth and the sun, the sun rays do not fall on the earth to the extent the moon is in between and as a result the sun does not appear. This is eclipse of the sun. If a person knows all these truths and writes a story with this knowledge, there will not be inconsistencies or mistakes.

Eclipses had been taking place even when human beings were not aware of these truths. People of those times interpreted the eclipse of the sun and the moon based on their imagination. By then, there were conflicts between hostile tribes. Therefore, they fabricated stories that some enemies were troubling the sun and the moon.

Even in these crazy stories, human relations of those times appear clearly.

Let us see this story. Rakshasas and gods together churned the sea for nectar. Nectar is produced. Gods tried to see that Rakshasas would not get their share. Fierce battle took place between the two parties. Vishnu (the god) assumed the form of Jaganmohini (a beautiful woman), took away the nectar and began to distribute among the gods. Two Rakshasas called Rahu and Ketu sat amidst the gods to drink nectar. Vishnu serves nectar to them as well. While they were drinking, the sun and the moon (These two are gods) gestured Vishnu. Vishnu at once cut the heads of those Rakshasas. By then nectar did not descend into their bellies. Therefore, their bodies died but heads were alive. Since then Rahu and Ketu were angry at the sun and the moon. Both of them swallow one each. However, they do not have bellies, do they? Therefore, the sun and the moon can come out freely. However, as long as they are in the mouths of these Rakshasas they do not appear for some time. This is what is called eclipse. This was the imagination of that time.

We come to know very surprising facts even from this stupid story. There are two hostile groups called gods and Rakshasas. Gods opposed to distribute jointly created fruits (nectar that they got after churning the sea of milk) among all people. They wanted to drink the entire nectar for themselves. Some courageous people among Rakshasas resisted it. However, they were killed in that fight. In this story, we find the disintegration of collective life in the Gen society. Thus, it gives very valuable information — just as we find a piece of a broken pot or a small bone in excavations!

Let us see some observations of Marx on mythology. (**Marx**, Karl. 1859. *A contribution to the critique of political economy.* Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970.)

"The charm their art has for us does not

conflict with the immature stage of the society in which it originated. On the contrary its charm is a consequence of this and is inseparably linked with the fact that the immature social conditions which gave rise, and which alone could give rise, to this art cannot recur." (217)

"....natural and social phenomena are already assimilated in an unintentionally artistic manner by the imagination of the people." (p. 216)

As the people of ancient times were not aware of the phenomena of nature, stories of Rahu and Ketu sort emerged. However, do Intellectuals and scientists of the present times not know the reasons for eclipses? They know. Yet, these Intellectuals attach value to the stories of Rahu and Ketu. They are taking bath on the occasion of eclipse. For this kind of practice, there is a reason akin to that of the reason for the past beliefs. People in the past did not have knowledge of nature as well as society. However, the present day intellectuals know about nature but they do not know about society. They are not aware of exploitation of labour, the problems that it creates and its culture. Or, even if they know to some extent, all the sections of the intelligentsia are usually act in favour of the exploiting class. They observe exploitative culture.

As the people of the ancient times had blind beliefs due to ignorance, they were faultless and hence innocent. However, Intellectuals of the modern times are real culprits because they observe superstitious beliefs, even though they know many things about nature.

We can see many examples concerning the bad or inappropriate portrayal of characters in *Ramayana*. The reason for bad portrayal lies in the form of writing.

Rama, though he is a great hero, wails every now and then. The intention of the poet is that however great hero a man might be, he faces some difficult situations and he feels sad. However, the poet ought to describe that sorrow or disappointment in an appropriate manner. If it exceeds the limit, it becomes an inconsistent or bad portrayal of characters. All this is a kind of logic. The period of mythology did not have logic in the creation of literature.

While Rama feels sad, Lakshmana preaches, "A hero, a warrior, must be bold and courageous!

While Sugriva wails, Hanuman tells the same morals and gently reprimands Sugriva.

Sugriva, who had to derive courage from Hanuman's words, advises Rama to be bold and courageous.

When great people like kings and officials face difficulties, their subordinates console them in various ways. It is a matter of shame if they derive courage from the words of their equals but they can derive courage from the words of subordinates. Subordinates consoling superiors is part of their service. Those who preach sermons, at the end, say, "I am not competent to advise you. I said so because I could not see your grief. I do not mean that you do not know all this I am saying."

Wives criticise husbands. Finally, they say, "I am not entitled to tell you this. I said so due to woman's mean mentality."

Character portrayal proceeds in this manner only. It is part of the form of writing of that time.

If a given form of writing is not appropriate, we should probe into the relevant reasons. Such probing is also examining or analysing society. On seeing the form of writing in *Ramayana*, if some one says that "This is not at all literature", it means, on seeing primitive man if we say, "This guy does not have any education or such like. Therefore, he is not at all a human being." The same primitive human being will gradually evolve into a civilized human being. Similarly, the inconsistent, haphazard and incoherent literature will gradually attain a higher form.

If we think, "A literature is literature only when it reaches a higher level. None of the ignorant writings of the past is literature", then it means we fail to understand the stages in the early creation of arts. It is like rejecting the process of evolution.

The society, which acquired knowledge of science, will not return to the primitive stage. The literature that reached a higher level will not go back to mythology. After people came to know that moon is a planet like earth, the moon will no longer sit on the matted locks of Siva's head. When cars, trains and planes entered into human life, horse riding and travelling in palanquins will not find place in society as well as literature. After guns began to be used as weapons, an archer cannot become the hero in the stories. (Here, we are not talking about re-writing the old stories. An archer-hero will not be created afresh.)

"Is Achilles possible when powder and shot have been invented?" (Marx in the same book mentioned above. P. 216)

Achilles is a great archer in Greek mythology. He is like our Rama and Arjuna. Once gun has been invented, it is not possible to create characters that exhibit their strength and abilities by means of bow.

However, even if a person becomes an adult and attains lot of knowledge, whenever he recollects his childhood, (Childhood with qualities of naughty behaviour, ignorance, innocence, rudeness), he gets a strange feeling. Similarly, a grown up society too gets a strange feeling when it observes the childhood stage of human society (also of literature). Marx calls that feeling "eternal charm".

"An adult cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. However, does the naiveté of the child not give him pleasure, and does not he himself endeavour to reproduce the child's veracity on a higher level? Does not the child in every epoch represent the character of the period in its natural veracity? Why should not the historical childhood of humanity, where it attained its most beautiful form, exert an eternal charm because it is a stage that will never recur?" (Marx in the same book mentioned above. P. 217).

Does 'society' not appear in *Ramayana*?

To see a society in a given writing at any given point of time, the inconsistencies, lack of sense of context, bad portrayal of character — none of these comes in our way in any manner. In the story of *Ramayana*, hundreds of facts about society appear. We have seen all of them in that story. Let us recall some of them here.

While Hanuman was searching for Sita in Lanka, he sees Ravana's wives, sleeping towards Ravana's feet. From the words, "Ravana's wives", is it not evident that it is a kind of society where a man has many wives? To say that those wives were lying at the feet of the husband. — From this description, is it not clear that men were superior and women were inferior?

See this incident.

While going in a chariot towards Dandakaranya to abduct Sita, Ravana sees a big Banyan tree on his way. Its branches are hundred-yojana long. One branch is found broken. The poet narrated a story about it. In the past, *Garuda* (an eagle) brought a big tortoise and an elephant and sat on this branch in order to eat them. Because of his weight, that branch broke with a great noise. Sages sat on that branch and were doing penances. (*In the primitive times, there were stages when human beings had their shelter on the trees in order to protect themselves from the wild animals. Sages performing penances on the tree branches may be understood in this way.*) As all the great sages may die if the branch fell down, Garuda held the branch with his beak, fixed the elephant and tortoise to his foot nails, and flew into the sky.

After going to some distance, he stood in the sky on one foot and ate the elephant and tortoise. Then he killed some *Boyas* (people of hunter caste) by hitting with that branch, saved sages and felt very happy. — This is the story. Is it not enough if the poet said that Garuda saved sages? Why should he kill Boyas? See, how joyfully the poet wrote and whose safety he kept in mind. "Garuda, the virtuous and best among birds, killed Boyas, rescued sages and felt extremely happy." From this story, are the superior position of Brahmins and low position of Sudras not evident?

Kutumbarao criticised my way of telling the episode in which Rama preached political morals to Bharata. "It is futile that Ranganayakamma found fault with Rama boring Bharata with political morals when Bharata met Rama in the forest. It is utter waste to write in detail about the negative feelings of other characters toward Rama. I do not understand as to what has the authoress expected in taking the original *Ramayana* so literally."

Yes, you do not understand. One will not understand any thing if he is not willing to understand.

In that scene where Rama preached political morals, did I write merely to indicate that Rama was boring other characters? In that scene there are many things concerning a given society. We find the hypocritical mentality of the hero of the story. Everything is connected with the theme of the story. Rama says to Bharata, "Have you lost your kingdom due to your inefficiency? (*I would not have lost it!*) Did people not accept you as the king? (*They would have accepted me!*) Are you ruling the kingdom with knack? (*I would have ruled it well!*) — This is how he asks. He talks with the attitude, "I am greater than you. I alone am competent to rule the kingdom."

This episode is useful to expose before the readers the characteristic features of the hero of the epic, namely, feudal pride, arrogance, treating others inferior and so on.

However, all this is futile, according to Kutumbarao.

In *Ramayana*, not only in the lengthy episodes but also in descriptions and similes, society appears. Fully blossomed trees look like noble men who wore ornaments! That nobility is due to ornaments. That is, due to riches and wealth. People who do not have that wealth and ornaments are not noble. They may be base, low or Sudras!

Sita says to Ravana, "Just as a Brahmin does not teach a mantra to a Sudra, I will not give my body to you." Observe the 'content' of this simile. We find caste distinctions in it.

The male elephant in the forest will have hundreds of loves. The female elephant does not have lovers.

Is this not an analysis of society through that story?

If we want to see the entire evolution of human society in a single story, no such story exists. Any story will indicate only some stage and conditions.

Ramayana does not cease to be literature for the reasons, which Kutumbarao showed to argue that *Ramayana* is not literature. Moreover, because of those reasons it becomes literature connected with a particular stage.

Ramayana is literature. It is a literature that was created in the childhood of literary history. It is a literature that reflects the values of feudal society, along with the remnants pre-feudal stages of society.

How does Marxist criticism of literature look like?

Kutumbarao expressed many more views in his review.

"I read many trashy writings which are useless for materialist analysis", says Kutumbarao. There is nothing wrong to characterize certain writings as 'trashy writings' and certain films 'as trashy films'. However, it is wrong to say, "They are not useful for a materialistic analysis". The reason for the making of trashy writings and trashy films is that conditions in society were so trashy! It means: In that society, on the one hand there are people who gain from producing that 'trash' and on the other hand, there are people who receive that trash without being aware of how that trash harms their lives. This is why trash is being produced.

However trash some thing may be and however good some thing may be, they do not come from a 'vacuum'. All those things are related to that society. Those characters exhibit good and bad of that society. Why are the books (or films) which are made in a society not useful for social analysis? We can examine any trashy text from a class perspective. 'Whether the text contains feudal ideas or bourgeois ideas? Or does it contain both? Which is dominant? To which class the theme is favourable? How does it favour? Is that text (or film) progressive or reactionary? — To understand all these aspects, the trash in a given book is not a hurdle. It will be useful to examine that trash!

For example, let us examine this trashy film story: the heroine is a devotee of Nagendra (god of snakes). She stands in front of an anthill of the snake, worships daily and one day he sees the snake and talks to it. It is her belief that the snake has been protecting her. However, the hero hates snakes since his mother died of snake bite. Once, it so happened that the snake sees the hero who was accompanying the heroine in the car. The hero, on seeing the snake, stopped the car and tried to drive the car over the snake with an intention to kill it. However, the car could not move forward. The hero picked up the gun and got down. However, the snake escaped into the trees. Hero and heroine went in the car but were trapped in a building at a night due to the plot of enemies. Next day they went to the grandfather of the heroine. That grand father suspected the grand daughter and tried to beat her saying, "Who will marry you now?" The hero assured to marry her. Later, on the day of marriage, while relatives of the bride were travelling in a bus, their enemies planted a bomb in the bus. Nagendra sensed this and reached the driver from the top of the bus because it wanted to rescue its devotee. When driver stopped the bus and began to run, all the passengers got down. Though bomb blasted the bus, there was no danger to the passengers. Later, marriage went off without any hurdle. Nagendra appeared to the devotee. While the bridegroom was attempting to kill Nagendra, the devotee fainted. Nagendra crawled over her stomach and relieved her from the faint. The devotee prayed to Nagendra to come every week and drink milk. From then onwards, disputes between the hero and the heroine about Nagendra increased. Finally, Nagendra rescued the husband of the devotee and killed all his enemies. The hero came to know that his mother died not because of snake bite but for some other reason. The hero, who had no superstitious notions earlier, became the devotee of Nagendra. — This is the story.

There is no doubt that this story is very trashy. Yet, it is not irrelevant for social analysis. This (belief in the snake as god) is a superstitious belief that was born in the pre-feudal era. In the subsequent period, it became part of feudal culture.

The main point in this story is a myth. This myth gives an opportunity to imagine impossible things as possible things.

Though the present day society has some knowledge of science, it is still not available to many people in society. Many people are still in the superstitious notions. (*Awareness of knowledge of science is not enough to give up superstitious notions. It is possible only when all the life conditions change.*)

This entire story proceeded with things like cars, guns, picnics, bombs. These are bourgeois features.

Belief in the miracle of Nagendra was born in the primitive society, developed in the feudal society and remained in the bourgeois society. In this story, the car did not move in the wake of Nagendra's miracle. The time bomb could not do any harm.

The nature of society, in which this film is made, is such that superstitious beliefs of pre-scientific era are still predominant. In other words, feudal mode of production is more dominant than capitalist (machine) production. However, creation of arts does not change in equal pace with the existing mode of production. As bourgeois society is also an exploitative society, the arts in bourgeois society will merge with the features of past-exploitative features. In the story of this film, superstitious beliefs defeat knowledge of science and become victorious. This means, feudal culture is predominant in this society.

This story turned the main character, which did not have superstitious beliefs earlier into the one who has such beliefs. This story does not give logical knowledge to people. It does not give new consciousness. It makes people, who think a little, step backwards. Thus, this is very useful to the interests of the exploiting class. That is, it betrays people.

Even in this society — where there is so much superstition, some books and films with progressive ideas also appear once in a while; but they are very few since majority of the people have superstitious beliefs.

What we have to understand is that any work that is trash or good is useful for analysis.

However, Kutumbarao says, "To analyse from a Marxist perspective, we have Kautilya's *Artha sastra* (Economic science), *Dharma sastras* (Codes), *Mahaabhaarata* and *Puranas* like *Harivamsa*. Why *Ramayana*?"

If we analyse Bhaarata, it will be an analysis of Bhaarata. If we analyse Harivamsa, it will be an analysis of Harivamsa. If we analyse another text, it will not be an analysis of *Ramayana*. If we look at Mukundarao or Govindarao in order to understand Kutumbarao, shall we understand any thing about Kutumbarao? Similarly, to understand *Ramayana*, we have to examine its story and its characters alone.

At another place in the review, Kutumbarao says, "I cannot appreciate *Ramayana* as literature." Appreciating it as literature is one thing and accepting it as literature is another thing. The two are not the same. It is not the question whether or not we appreciate *Ramayana*. The question is whether we accept it as literature. Whether somebody appreciates or not, *Ramayana* is literature. One must accept this. If a rationalist says that a religious text is no literature or if a devotee of god says that an atheistic text is no literature — both views are wrong.

At another place, Kutumbarao says, "I think the story of Rama whom masses of people worship — has not at all given inspiration to '*The poisonous tree*'. This means, people worship not the character of Rama in '*The Poisonous Tree*'. Rama in the '*The Poisonous Tree*' does not appear worthy to worship. In the story, which people hear Rama appears worthy to worship. People are worshipping such character. — This is what he meant.

Is there any difference between the story of Rama, whom masses of people worship and the story in '*The Poisonous Tree*'? There is no difference. While narrating the story in the original, I made my criticism on the incidents in the story. For this, I have shown evidence from the original.

People do not know certain facts that are there in the original story. True. However, is the story, which people know worthy to worship? Do people not know that Rama — who ought to have given up the kingdom as per father's order — has agreed to keep his sandals on the throne? Do people not know that Rama — who ought to have lead the life of a sage — has always carried bow, hunted and waged battles? Do people not know that Rama killed Vali stealthily? Do people not know that Rama demanded his wife to undergo a test to prove her chastity? Finally, do people not know that Rama abandoned his wife in the forests? — People know all this. What people do not know is to question. In fact, people do not know that all these are faults. They have to acquire this new thinking.

The lives of people are filled with hardships. They are obliged to believe some god or not. People of previous generation preach this belief to every succeeding generation. People fall a prey to superstitious notions right from the childhood. This will continue throughout the life. Without realising the mistakes in the stories of god, people consider gods as worthy of worshiping. So what? Should we let that worship continue like that? Is it Kutumbarao's opinion that we need not attempt to remove ignorance of people?

Referring to Ahalya's episode, Kutumbarao says, "There is no end to the adultery of wives of the sages!"

In response to this, I said, "Those who understand stages of history do not describe the actions of the wives of the sages like Ahalya as adultery.

As a reply to my comment, Kutumbarao said, "The Puranics called the actions of the wives of sages like Ahalya adultery….their husbands cursed them and their children. If I call it adultery, why should you find fault with me?"

Does Kutumbarao, who claims to be a materialist also judge Ahalya as Puranics do? Why did Ahalya's husband, who initially rejected, later accept her? Why did her son (Satananda) also respect his mother? Why did Viswamitra make young Rama salute Ahalya? Unconcerned with any of these facts, Kutumbarao also calls Ahalya an adulterous woman since her husband sage Gautama said so.

'Since her husband said so, I too said the same', says Kutumbarao. Then Kutumbarao will become sage Kutumbarao. How can he become a Marxist who understands stages in the history?

If a Marxist critic does not view incidents from his theoretical knowledge but views them from the perspectives of pundits who believe in god and sages who do penances, he will no longer remain a Marxist.

In the words of Lunacharsky: "If a Marxist cannot objectively sense the ties between the phenomena which surround him, then he is finished as a Marxist." (p. 13 in his same book mentioned above.)

Kutumbarao says, "I had considered *Ramayana* a trashy text. Forty years ago, I criticised Mr. Viswanatha for writing '*Ramayana Kalpavruksham*'."

He criticised *Kalpa vruksham* (The 'wishing' tree in the Hindu paradise) that defends *Ramayana* as well as *Visha vruksham* (The Poisonous Tree) that opposes *Ramayana*! This is surprising!

"There is some meaning to stop reading or burning *Ramayana*. But it is meaningless to re-write it in this manner", Kutumbarao concluded.

Have I 'rewritten' *Ramayana* to glorify it?

He says there is some meaning to stop reading or burning *Ramayana*. However, if people have to stop reading, listening or respecting *Ramayana*, should they not know truth about it? Will people stop reading and listening without changing old beliefs? Will they burn it?

Kutumbarao has not found meaning in 'rewriting' *Ramayana*. However, this 'rewriting' is meant to explain people that it is not a holy book and people do not benefit from it! If more people do this kind of attempt, it will be very good.

It is something incomprehensible to say, 'It is not necessary to do this kind of work. It has no meaning.'

Concerning reactionary things and the way in which Marxists act, let us hear **Mao's words:**

"Every thing reactionary is the same. It will not fall unless we hit it. It is like sweeping the floor. In whatever corner the broomstick does not go, the dust remains there. This dust does not go wherever we do not sweep." (Requoted from *Chinese Literature*, No. 6, 1974)

Kutumbarao finally concluded, "This (*The Poisonous Tree*) is something which she wrote out of fancy."

All right! I wrote it out of fancy. If some one has a fancy to criticise *Ramayana* and teach people some thing, is it a crime? Is it wrong?

[Translation: **B.R. Bapuji**]

3. Kotta Satyanarayana Chowdary's 'Secrets of Ramayana'(of Valmiki)'★

"Just as we have Telugu version of Sanskrit 'Bharata', we do not have suitable version in Telugu for Valmiki ('s *Ramayana*)." This is the view of Mr. Satyanarayana. (*Hereafter Satyanarayana*)

Referring to the version of *Ramayana* by Bhaskara, Ranganatha and Molla, Satyanarayana says as follows: "Sita in these versions is different and Valmiki's Sita is different. That Rama is different. This modern Rama is different. The difference between Valmiki's characters and the characters of these writers is as much as that between vessels of worship and earthen vessels. Without talking about such modern writers, I have examined only Valmiki's work comprehensively." This means, he has a positive opinion on the portrayal of characters in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Hence, he ignored other versions of *Ramayana* and exclusively relied on Valmiki *Ramayana* and wrote this review. He added the word Valmikam (Valmiki's version), to the title of his essay. (*He wrote this essay in Granthika style, an old literary variety of Telugu. Even though he wrote this essay in the recent past, he used everywhere archaic letters that represent nasal sound and trill 'r' sound. It seems he has not heard about Mr. Gidugu Ramamurti, a famous advocate of the use of modern Colloquial Telugu.*)

There may be lot of difference between characters in Valmiki's version and other versions of *Ramayana* in terms of descriptions, incidents and dialogues. However, there is no difference in the nature of the characters, their values and the direction of the story. For Valmiki, Sita is a devoted and chaste woman. Whatever values Rama of Valmiki has, Rama of other versions of *Ramayana* too has the same values. If the poetic talent of Valmiki is greater than that of others, then that greatness relates to poetry but not the nature of the characters.

He has stated the objective of his essay as follows: "The debate 'whether Sri Rama is a god or not' is different. How that character was portrayed in Valmiki? Why should we understand that character as an ideal one? This writing is aimed at discussing the issues of this sort."

This means Satyanarayana views the character of Rama as portrayed in Valmiki *Ramayana* as an ideal one.

He has discussed certain issues, which we generally consider criticism-worthy while reading Valmiki *Ramayana*. He mentions inconsistencies and mutually contradictory aspects. However, he says that not all those are mistakes of Valmiki.

"However much we may praise Valmiki as the first poet and sage-poet and that his work is extremely touching to heart, there appear many inconsistencies and self-contradictions in depicting the qualities of characters. Different versions of the text and interpolations that came after Valmiki might be the reason for them", he observed. Which means, Satyanarayana also belongs to the same category of scholars who argue that Valmiki wrote well as far as he was concerned and Valmiki is not responsible for the so called mistakes in *Ramayana*.

Let us examine in an order some incidents, which he discussed.

★ Satyanarayana Chowdary, Kotta. 1968. *Ramayana Rahasyaalu* (Valmikam). Nidubrolu, Guntur district: Bhaashaa Poshaka Granthamandali. First edition.

Dasaratha bringing *Payasam* (sweet) and distributing among his three wives — which is there in Valmiki is not palatable to Satyanarayana. He liked an incident, which is present in Champu *Ramayana*. In this version of *Ramayana*, Dasaratha brings Payasam and gives half each to Kausalya and Kaika only. Then, Kausalya and Kaika take out half each from their respective portions and give to Sumitra. Lakshmana is born out of the Payasam which Kausalya gave, and he becomes favourable to Rama. Satrughna is born out of the Payasam which Kaika gave and be becomes favourable to Bharata. Kalidas also wrote about the same kind of distribution in his "Raghu vamsa", says Satyanarayana. Mentioning this, Satyanarayana praised the distribution thus, "This solidarity (between the two sets of brothers) is charming." Lakshmana always stays with Rama and Satrughna with Bharata, don't they? The rationalism which showed the actual reason for the solidarity of the brothers so clearly — appealed to Satyanarayana! He discovered the reason for distributing Payasam in Valmiki so inconsistently. — That reason is that it was the work of subsequent poets!

".....If we want to establish consistency, the reasons might be things like Interpolations...."

So whatever mistake one finds in Valmiki's story, they should think that it is an act of the subsequent poets who committed mistakes, which Valmiki did not do? 'They were also poets, weren't they? They were also devotees, weren't they?' — None should think along these lines!

However, between the two methods of distributing Payasam, Valmiki's method is more sensible than that of Kalidas. According to Valmiki's method, Dasaratha gave Payasam to all the three wives. According to Kalidas' method, Dasaratha ignored Sumitra – *did not even see her face*! Can devotees project Dasaratha like this? More importantly, according to the second method, Rama becomes an equal of his brothers. Rama is as equal as Satrughna. According to Valmiki's method, it is not so. Then Rama alone represents half essence of Vishnu. All his brothers were quarter or a quarter and half. Now, which is better Valmiki's account or Champu's account?

Satyanarayana concluded that many scenes in Valmiki *Ramayana* are false. However, he dumps them into Interpolations since it does not look nice if he says Valmiki wrote wrongly.

Wherever he does not like an incident in the story, he says 'Interpolations intruded into the story!' Owing to them, injustice has been done to all the characters, he says. "Things like Interpolations had been inserted in appropriate manner at respective places and they cause injustice to the respective characters." (P. 202 in Satyanarayana's book.)

If he has such a strong belief that the characters have been spoiled due to Interpolations, he should ignore that story and those characters, shouldn't he? Why should he attempt to criticize them?

Satyanarayana claimed that he wrote this essay based on Valmiki only, didn't he? He has even titled it as 'Valmikam'. However, he relied more on other versions of *Ramayana* than that of Valmiki.

Observe Ahalya's episode.

According to Valmiki, Gautama is Ahalya's husband. Their son is Satananda. Ahalya 'meets' Indra willingly. This is what Valmiki informs us. Satyanarayana has ignored this story. He mentioned the story from '*Vichitra* (Strange) *Ramayana*'. In this story, Ahalya got not only a son called Satananda but also a daughter called Anjana through her husband (Gautama). In this story while going out, Gautama, suspecting that his wife might flirt with other men, used to carry her *life* with him. Once, Gautama took away his wife's *life* while going out. Ahalya's body was lying in the hermitage. Indra and Sun.had been waiting for Ahalya for a long time. As soon as he saw Ahalya's body, Indra entered into it. Then the Sun satisfied his lust with her. Similarly, the Sun entered Ahalya's body and Indra satisfied his desire. Ahalya was not aware of all these things. Later, Ahalya got two sons. Gautama was not aware that these kids were not his. One day, holding these sons to his bosom and walking Anjana, Gautama was going somewhere in the sun. When Anjana's feet burnt due to the Sun, she said, "You are walking your daughter. You held others' children to your bosom." Then Gautama threw those kids into the sea and said, "If these children are not mine, they will turn into monkeys." They turned into monkeys. Those were Vali and Sugriva. This is the story. (*Thereafter, according to another story, Ahalya cursed Anjana, "Do you tell scandals against me. Turn into a monkey." This Anjana became a Vanara woman and begot Hanuman through Vayu, the god of wind! I do not know whether this story is also from 'Vichitra Ramayana' or not. No details are there in Satyanarayana's book!*)

According to 'Vichitra *Ramayana*', Satananda, Vali and Sugriva were brothers. Hanuman was a nephew to these three. In fact, this story is not connected with Valmiki. Yet, Satyanarayana resorted to criticism based on this story. "Gautama was Anjaneya's (Hanuman's) mother's father (maternal grand father). Vali and Sugriva were maternal uncles." (p. 20)

Since Satananda was the priest of Rama's father-in-law and Sugriva was Satananda's younger brother, friendship between Rama and Sugriva became possible! (*Then, Rama should also have friendship with Vali, shouldn't he?*) However, there was hostility with Vali! He has not mentioned why that hostility?

"Because of Satananda.... and Ahalya....., friendship between Sri Rama and Sugriva strengthened. As this friendship strengthened, hostility with powerful Vali became intense" — This is what Satyanarayana discovered! He has done this so not based on Valmiki. Based on 'Champu'.

Ahalya committed 'adultery', he says. According to the story he cited, Ahalya, in fact, was not aware of Indra and the Sun. Then, what would be her fault?)

Anjana too committed 'adultery', he says. She begot Hanuman through Vayu, instead of her husband Kesari! This critic does not know the fact that man-woman relationships were so during the period to which these stories refer.

He has anger toward Gautama as well! Not because that he carried along his wife's life while going out. He cited another story for this. Even this story is not from Valmiki! The story is the following: Brihaspati went to the house of a sage and asked the wife of that sage who was then pregnant. The infant in her womb reprimanded Brihaspati, "Your desire is not justified"! Brihaspati got angry and cursed that infant to 'become blind'. After that, he satisfied his desire for her and left. The name of that child is Dirghatama. He became blind. When he became adult, he married a woman called 'Chandika'. Gautama was born to him. After some time when Dirghatama was being washed away in a stream, a king rescued him. That king did not have children. Since that the king prayed to him, Dirghatama had agreed to *meet* the king's wives. They begot children. Satyanarayana brought this story — which is not there in Valmiki — from somewhere and ridiculed Gautama thus, "Our respected Gautama is the one who joined the own sons of that Dirghatama."

According to this story, is Gautama at fault? Even, is there any fault of Dirghatama here? The king himself requested him. That his wives were not begetting children due to him and he wanted children. There was no secret in it. Such were the practices of the day. Even if we assume that Dirghatama did some thing, what had Gautama to do with it?

Do we ridicule Gautama because of Dirghatama? What sort of tradition is this — to respect or disrespect children because of their parents and family background?

Satyanarayana has the same ridicule for Hanuman! "That Anjana got Vayu as another husband! Our venerable Anjaneya was born to these two!" (p. 20) This is the criticism.

According to Satyanarayana, Anjana was not a noble woman. It was Anjaneya's fault to have been born to such a woman.

'Anjaneya is declaring himself with pride that he is the son of Vayu! These man-woman relationships were so open without any secrecy. Were such relationships very common in the past history?' — The critic does not have this kind of thinking. See how shamelessly he is commenting on these relations! "What more adulterous stories will be in the world than these stories? What is false if we state that *Ramayana* is full of stories of adultery? (p. 22)

"......There are many respected ladies who when they were virgins met some unknown fellows, became pregnant, threw away the newly born infants, married later and became famous in Puranas as devoted wives and chaste women." (p. 24)

What should we infer from the stories of women who begot children before marriage and threw them away? We have to understand that the earlier traditions concerning man-woman relations had been changing and begetting children with out marriage was becoming wrong. The relationship called 'marriage' or its rules have not been there since the beginning. All of them have gradually come into existence. That is why we find stories without any restrictions and stories with restrictions have recently begun. Satyanarayana has not grasped any of these things. He is viewing the past relations from a present perspective. Unable to understand them, he is finding fault with them as 'adultery'.

"We heard that Ahalya was Vali's mother and Vali was one of the children whom Ahalya begot due to her adulterous relationships with Devendra." (p.164)

"This adulterous Hanuman....."

"I request the readers to examine these stories remembering the fact that there is no dearth for adultery and lies in Puranas." (p. 24)

This is Satyanarayana's criticism!

★ ★

Let us see about Parasurama.

Gadi's son is Viswamitra and daughter is Satyavati. They are Kshatriyas.

Satyavati's husband is Ruchika. He is a Brahmin. Their son is Jamadagni. Jamadagni is considered a Brahmin.

Jamadagni's wife is Renuka. She is a Kshatriya woman. Parasurama is their son. Parasurama is a Brahmin.

Renuka going to a river for water, seeing another man there — this story is not in Valmiki.

Satyanarayana brought this story also from outside. Renuka went to fetch water. As she did not return for a long time, her husband saw her with divine sight. "....When he saw in a mirror called divine sight, that lady was found immersed in chitchatting and kissing with another man!" (p. 36). The story went on like this. This critic narrated how 'immoral' this Renuka was and exposed the secret as follows: "In the story of *Ramayana*, this is the secret of the incarnation of Parasurama who was born amidst the adultery of hybrid castes in the nasty home of Jamadagni." (p. 36)

Mr. Satyanarayana! Parasurama was born to Jamadagni, wasn't he? The incident of Renuka flirting with another man happened after Parasurama was born, didn't it? Then, how can Parasurama be somebody who was born out of adulterous relationship? If you intend to tell people how stupid it is to worship Parasurama as an incarnation, you have to put forward fair and appropriate logic. Why these obscene abuses? Why these accusations of 'adultery'?

Here, there is one very surprising point.

This man does not like mixing of Brahmin caste and Kshatriya caste. He thinks it leads to adulteration of castes. "While Gadheya was a Kshatriya reaching the status of a Brahmana sage due to refinement, Jamadagni and Jaamadagnu (that is Jamadagni's son) degenerated to the occupation of Kshatriya...." (p. 34). We do not understand what Kshatriya occupation did Jamadagni and his son pursue but it is Satyanarayana's view that they 'degenerated'. Kshatriyas becoming Brahmins is a great thing. However, Brahmins becoming Kshatriyas is 'degeneration.!

Talking about these castes at another place, he argues, "Can we, in fact, confidently tell that the kings of those days were the offspring of Kshatriyas? Is it possible to decide what that 'soil' was, what that 'seed' was, how they resulted, who were of pure castes and who were of adulterated castes? As the parents of Parasurama did not belong to the same caste, he became the member of adulterated caste and became the target of the ridicule of this critic. Commenting that it is foolish to worship Parasurama as an incarnation, the reason that this critic puts forward is that Parasurama was born to an immoral woman! We cannot say that he ridiculed the family background of Parasurama out of his anger toward the incarnation of Parasurama. See another point. Do you remember that Dasaratha went for hunting when he was young and killed the son of a Sudra sage? Even while referring to the parents of that boy, this man ridiculed as follows: "Adulterous sage and his wife" (p. 43). Again about them, at another place: ".....What is the caste of the sage? His lineage? Father was a Vysya, mother a Sudra. The one who was born to them is the son of a sage, they say!" (p. 121) — This is how this critic wondered. Same ridicule toward the son of the sage as much ridicule as he has towards Parasurama! However, this critic exhibited lot of love for low castes in his preface to the essay. "The castes which have been suppressed and pushed to the lowest step for the generations by a great malady called caste hatred...." (Preface, p. 7) The critic thus showered a lot of sympathy on the 'suppressed' castes. However, what is his criticism against the same oppressed castes? He has a slight opinion of low castes. His *body burns with anger* if castes mix. All the people in the past accepted the child of a Vysya sage and Sudra woman as the son of a sage but he says he will not accept. His argument is: one should become the son of a sage if he is born to Brahmins.... how can he become the son of a sage when he was born like this? This argument is more backward than the time of *Ramayana*!

The critic, who holds such views, makes scathing attacks in his essay, with great abuses in old Telugu against Brahmins who observe caste distinctions and exhibited his cultural level.

He was angry with Jamadagni for not keeping his wife under 'control'.

"Such angry men, such merciful men, such experts in cursing people — what might be the reason for not rectifying undesirable deeds that take place in their nasty homes?" (p. 36)

What was the undesirable deed that happened at Jamadagni's house? It was Renuka's episode. What does 'rectification' mean? Even though Jamadagni had her head slain with an axe, this critic was not satisfied with that harshness. This critic is angry as 'why Jamadagni did not keep his wife under control at the beginning itself in such a way that she could not see the face of another man! Jamadagni had her head slain after some thing had happened. According to the critic, women must be kept in a *trap made of swords* so that they cannot move right from the beginning!

This critic digested all the vileness of ideas, which some men hold against women. "When we say that there is truth in saying that *Ramayana* is 'adultery' and Bharata is a 'lie', there may be people who raise hue and cry and *beat their chest*. For these two stories, women have been mainly responsible. It is not wrong to say that women characters in *Ramayana* and Bharata are responsible for the sayings that 'woman's mentality leads to doom' (*strii buddhi pralayaanta karii*) and 'women are stupid and selfish, let them be blamed' (*dhigastu yooshitoo naama sathaaha swaartha paraayanaaha*)" (p.7) This is the great secret which this man revealed after churning *Ramayana*!

It is women who are responsible for (the stories of) *Ramayana* and Bharata! Sayings like, 'women's mentality leads to doom' had come into vogue because of those women! Here, let us not talk about Bharata. Can anybody except this man — say that Sita in *Ramayana* is a bad woman or base woman?

Who utter words like, 'The mentality of woman is not good. They are base'. Men who are base, selfish and arrogant alone talk like this. If he talked so wretchedly about Sita, what refined culture does this man have?

This man's criticism has nowhere proceeded from a rationalistic perspective. Referring to the attitude of north Indians that they consider south India as a land of sin, he says, "...Well, any way, who are they to decide what sin is and what piety is? In the same south India about which they talk, three great 'aachaaryaas' (teachers) emerged and gave alms of knowledge to the entire India" (p. 40). He thus, explained the piety of South India.

To prove that south India is not a land of sin, he is arguing, "Here three teachers were born. How can this be a sinful land?" To those fools who say, 'South India is a land of sin,' this argument is okay. However, due to bad luck if those teachers were not born here, would it have become a sinful land? Then one has to accept that 'south India' is a land of sin?

About Dasaratha, Satyanarayana says, "....Even though he ruled the country for sixty thousand years he could not get even one male child. (*Will male children be born if a man rules a country?*) Either because of worry that he did not have children or because of his infatuation for women, he went to king Kekaya and requested to give Ḳaika as wife" (p. 73) According to this, sixty thousand years had passed before Dasaratha's marriage with Kaika. However, at another place, he tells us that sixty thousand years had passed after Dasaratha married Kaika. At the time of marriage, Dasaratha promised that he would give the kingdom to Kaika's son. It was enough if Kaika asked for the kingdom as her right. Why should she ask for boons? — thus questioning, Satyanarayana answers as follows: "She heard this talk of presenting the kingdom long time ago when she was young! Now after sixty thousand years have passed, she forgot about it and she might have asked for those two boons which she secured later." (p. 73)

This is to say: Kaika forgot that kingdom belonged to her because sixty thousand years had passed after her marriage. According to this answer, sixty thousand years had passed after Dasaratha's marriage with Kaika.

One argument here! Another argument there!

So much contradiction in the same page!

If this happens in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, he would say, "Would Valmiki write so inconsistently? This is the work of subsequent writers."

Well, then, what reason does he show for such a contradiction in the same page of his essay? Under the pretext of Interpolations which do you consider an Interpolation and on whom you will throw the responsibility?

Dasaratha married Kaika after sixty thousand years of his rule had passed. As sixty thousand years had passed after marriage, Kaika forgot about the right over the kingdom! According to this, the age of Dasaratha is one lakh 20 thousand years! Excellent, Mr. Satyanarayana! You have made us forget Valmiki!

Since Dasaratha was arranging to pass the kingdom (which he ought to give to Bharata) to Rama, and thus he overruled her right, Kaika, as a last attempt, asked for her boons. Satyanarayana has not understood this point.

★ ★

Satyanarayana criticises Rama some times. Praises some times. Sometimes, he talks about Rama in such a way that we cannot understand what he wants to say.

He praised Rama that he behaved very nobly when Kaika called him (when he was ready for coronation) and informed him about her boons. Again, the next moment, he says, 'it might be a worldly-wise behaviour'. "In the words of Rama which he uttered to his step-mother after seeing his father, truth, modesty and forbearance are evident. Sri Rama must be better in good qualities compared to an utter stupid fellow like Lakshmana." (p. 84)

Again, the next moment, to be on the safe side, he comments, "This may be his morality and honesty. Or, it may be worldly-wise behaviour" (p. 86). This means, he attributed two kinds of qualities and kept quiet without concluding whether Rama is a good man or bad man. Could this be the 'worldly-wise' attitude of this critic?

Concerning the scenes, which create doubt that Rama is not committed to one wife, Satyanarayana also talks like other critics. Finally, he arrives at the view that Rama was not committed to one wife. For this view, he has not relied on Valmiki. He took evidence from many versions of *Ramayana* like *Daurvasa Ramayana, Brahma Purana, Pancha Ratra, Padma Sahita* and *Agastya Ramayana*. In all the *Ramayanas*, Rama has many wives. Those poets have clearly talked about it.

Just because Rama has many wives in other versions of *Ramayana*, is it possible to argue, with that evidence, that Rama has many wives in Valmiki also? Does he say, 'Even if we base on Valmiki, it will be clear that Rama has many wives' ? Then, why should he bring in other stories as evidence? It is because he is unable to prove the point based on Valmiki, is it not so?

★ ★

Satyanarayana liked Hanuman's skill as a messenger. As Hanuman let off Lankini scot-free, without killing her, he praised Hanuman a lot. "Since he followed *Vira Dharma* (Morality of a warrior) that he should not kill women, Lanka — which was so powerful — yielded to him. Though Rama and Lakshmana departed from the morality that they should not kill women, it is noteworthy that Rama's messenger Hanuman has followed it." (p. 188)

See, what he is saying at another place. "Rama's devotee Hanuman who killed women abused Indrajit as a wicked man who killed women. Perhaps, Hanuman does not remember his own killings of women." (p. 241)

He remembers it. You only do not remember what you wrote in the previous chapter! At one place, you write that he does not kill women and at another place, you write that he killed women! Of the two, which is an Interpolation? Who did like this without your knowledge?

Satyanarayana is praising Hanuman for every thing. Finally see how he praised even for burning Lanka. "After Ravana put all his questions, Hanuman explained his task without concealing even a little bit. When they imposed an appropriate punishment, Hanuman burnt Lanka so that the punishment applied to them, caused surprise and fear and left home. This great warrior is the basis for the proverb, '*when we told him to go and see, he returned burning it down*!' (p. 216). In this manner, Satyanarayana is fascinated by Hanuman. (*He liked all the deeds of Hanuman. However, his body burns with anger if he remembers the father of Hanuman!*) Forgetting his own objective in his attempt to criticise *Ramayana*, Satyanarayana submerged in praising Hanuman more than Hanuman's devotees. Then, instead of worshipping *Ramayana*, why should he resort to this criticism?

Satyanarayana criticised Rama for saying to Vali, "I have killed you because you are a monkey!". He scolded Rama thus, "Those who fight battles — are they monkeys? The same man (the critic) reprimanded Hanuman when he leaped on seeing Mandodari. ".....If he begins to act like a monkey, will the people there not wake up? Does he not have the sense that people may wake up? Moreover midnight has passed. Is it not time for some to wake up?.... Anyway, a monkey is a monkey, isn't it?" (p.196). Thus, he made Hanuman a human and talked with disgust. (*Yes, Hanuman jumped like a monkey and made Satyanarayana angry!*)

It was okay if a monkey went as a messenger! It was also all right when he searched harems! Talking like a monkey was also good! Whereas noisy jumping is not good! 'Midnight has passed; some people may get up', says the critic!

What is this expectation of realism in the story of a monkey, snake or an ant?

All the while when Hanuman searched Lanka, he saw golden platforms, golden posts, paths of pearls and gems.....precious stones....all such things appeared. Valmiki depicted Lanka like this because Rama was going to occupy and confiscate all those riches and wealth. What joy will be there in occupying it if it were a poor country?

However, all the pundits really believe Valmiki's descriptions! On seeing such descriptions, devotees of Ravana say, 'See how Dravidian kingdoms were *swinging in riches and wealth*! Valmiki himself depicted that Ravana's kingdom is so great!'

Satyanarayana also said the same thing, "The fact that in those days, there was no other kingdom that equalled the prosperity and civilisation of Dravidian emperor Ravana." (p.190).

Valmiki did not refer to Ravana as 'Dravidian Emperor'. He called him ten-headed Rakshasa. In the story of ten headed Rakshasa, we find golden mansions, paths filled with gems and airplanes driven by mind. All these are features of myths.

As they do not like to treat Ravana as a Rakshasa and talk about by making a human being and a Dravidian king, from where do those golden mansions, platforms and airplanes come from? Devotees of Ravana treat Ravana as a human being. However, they say they will not leave those golden mansions!

Valmiki described not only gold and gems. He also described that people in Lanka were very ugly and cruel with faces of oxen, pigs and donkeys and with two, three faces as well. Those who argue that there were golden mansions in Dravidian kingdom, will they acknowledge that there were people with these faces of oxen and dogs? Nay, it is not possible. Dravidian people are not like that. They are much civilised. Beautiful. Who depicted such beautiful Dravidians as ugly people? 'Who else? Should we say it again? Interpolators! The subsequent poets!' It is Satyanarayana's view that Valmiki did not depict Ravana as a Rakshasa! "....The blind attitude of the subsequent poets — who portrayed and described such a foremost civilized race as ugly and as anti-traditional....." (p. 190-91). Thus, Satyanarayana attacked the subsequent poets. He rescued Valmiki by throwing the responsibility of describing Dravidian race as Rakshasas onto other poets. (*Mr. Valmiki! You cannot repay the debt of Mr. Satyanarayana even if you trans into any number of births!*)

According to Satyanarayana, it was Valmiki who described the golden mansions in Lanka. However, it was subsequent poets who depicted people of Lanka as Rakshasas.

People in Lanka were not Rakshasas. Humans!

The houses in Lanka were not made of earth but of gold and gems!

What more can we talk about this kind of devotees of Dravidians? They ought to always immerse in reciting Valmiki *Ramayana* and have golden dreams.

Leaving *Ramayana*, if they enter real Dravidian kingdom, they will inevitably find earthen walls, earthen roads and earthen houses!

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Some observations which Satyanarayana made in the context of Sita's fire test are good. "It was a non-Aryan practice to test a woman with fire when she followed a wrong path. We hear that these fire tests are still in vogue among tribals and uncivilized people in some regions of the Indian soil. They observe the result by testing erred woman by putting fire in her palms or walk her on fire or touching a red hot metal to the hand." (p. 143)

When they suspect women, men subject them to fire test and torture them, don't they? Cultured men should be angry with such wicked men, shouldn't they? However, Satyanarayana has no criticism against Rama who subjected Sita to fire test. Moreover, he defended Rama that Rama has no suspicion of Sita and he subjected his wife to the fire test for the sake of others only. "That custom might be in vogue among the tribes who were living in Lanka at that time. Although he knew the truth, Rama might have thought to conduct this test for the satisfaction of those tribes." (p. 142)

A while ago, he called the people of Lanka 'civilized tribe'. Now, the same people of Lanka became uncivilized people who demand fire test! Therefore, Rama behaved with Sita in that manner for the satisfaction of people of Lanka at one time and for the satisfaction of people of Ayodhya at another time! Satyanarayana meant that Rama did so not out of suspicion on Sita.

Satyanarayana demonstrated some anger toward Rama for sending Hanuman to test Bharata before he was leaving for Ayodhya. "Have you observed Sri Rama's attitude? A soft tiger! A shrewd politician.... Can he suspect Bharata who has good qualities?" (p. 251)

Again, he is fascinated by Rama's modesty saying that Rama has love for Bharata and he also knew pretty well about Bharata's love! In Chitrakuta, Bharata told Rama that he would wait for Rama for fourteen years and he would jump into the fire if Rama does not return on a particular day.

According to Satyanarayana, Rama sent Hanuman to Bharata out of fear that Bharata might die and hence Hanuman must convey the news.... 'If you inform him suddenly that we were coming, he may go mad out of joy....", said Rama. (p. 254)

At one place, Satyanarayana said that Sri Rama behaved with a political tactic like a soft tiger. At another place, he said Rama had lot of love for Bharata.

From this, will the readers understand Satyanarayana's views on Rama? Should we think one of these views is an interpolation?

Satyanarayana thinks that Rama committed mistakes simply because he was sunk in the devotion for Brahmins, otherwise he would not have committed even those mistakes. "Because he had crazy devotion for Brahmins, Sri Rama had driven to forest his lawful wife Sita who considered him a god." (p. 123) What did Brahmins do in the case of Sita? Did Brahmins teach him to abandon Sita?

Talking about Rama's kingdom, Satyanarayana simply stated in his own words that Rama's kingdom is not an ideal kingdom. He did not give even one example. "In fact Rama's kingdom was a kingdom where young and old starved for food crying, 'We want food, O Rama Chandra!' Due to lack of proper care and rule, it was in a ruinous state for fourteen years. The political set up was reversed, food was not enough due to bad harvest and those were the days when people cried, 'O, Lakshmana! Save us!' Or, those were the days, when Rama lost his wife Sita due to his own deeds and when cried, 'O Lakshmana!' (p.117)

Before Rama's return, that kingdom was in a ruinous state, the critic says! Even though the story tells us that wealth increased ten fold during Bharata's rule, this critic has ignored it. He says there was drought in the kingdom during Bharata's rule. If people faced hardships during Bharata's rule, would it be some thing connected with Rama's rule? To say that it was not well during Bharata's period, it means that he acknowledged that everything is well after Rama started his rule, isn't it? Is Rama wailing for Sita a proof to show that Rama's rule was not well?

While claiming that all his criticism relates to Valmiki's original, Satyanarayana discussed many issues which were not there in Valmiki — like attributing sin of killing a Brahmin (*Brahma hatya*) to Rama because he killed Ravana.

It is a positive feature to undertake criticism with a view to oppose . "....crude and blind reading of texts *like a blind bull pushing into the field*". (Preface, p. 6). However, what this critic did is also 'pushing into the field like a blind bull'! All that he declared is nothing but reverence to *Ramayana*! ★

[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

4. Suravaram Pratapa Reddy's 'Specialities of 'Ramayana'★

This critic is totally favourable to Valmiki *Ramayana*. He wrote this book with an objective of explaining the beauty, facts and speciality of *Ramayana*. It is almost an argument of devotees of Rama. He made a mild criticism of one or two episodes like 'killing of Vali'. That too, in such a way that it does not affect the reputation of Valmiki and Rama.

He opined that the *Ramayana* really took place. "In my opinion, there is no strong proof to say that Sri Rama is a fictitious character. There is scope to believe that important incidents of *Ramayana* actually took place." (p.1)

He says there is no evidence to show that this story did not happen. As there is no such evidence, it is possible to believe that this story has happened.

When and for what do we find evidence? We find it only if something has happened. The same evidence proves that something has happened. If that thing has not happened, where is the question of evidence for some thing, which has not happened? This means, we have to first understand that evidence exists only for those things, which have happened. To understand whether some thing has happened or not, there should be some evidence. If something is proved to have happened by the evidence, then the argument that 'it did not happen' will be defeated. This means, in order to find out whether *Ramayana* has happened or not, those who argue that it has happened must show some evidence to that effect. People of the opposite view will examine whether that evidence is correct or not. However, people who oppose have no need to prove anything by showing evidence.

It is not possible to show proof that *Ramayana* happened. Therefore, when Mr. Pratapa Reddy (hereafter Pratapa Reddy) says, "What is the proof to show that it did not happen? Show the proof! Otherwise, it means it happened!" This is an attempt to win an argument (which can not be proved) with the help of the defeat of opposite argument!

"Owing to the noble qualities of Rama, the Hindus worship him as a god. Hence, the poets described the aspects of his history as superhuman and expanded it" (p.1). He believes that *Ramayana* really happened and it is history. However, the question whether it happened or not is not a debatable point. What is important is its contents.

"*Ramayana* is an ideal book to Aryans. All its noble characters are ideals for us. (*Only if we are Aryans, or even if we are Dravidians?*) A king like Rama, a wife like Sita, a servant like Hanuman, a brother like Lakshmana, a devotee like Bharata, a friend like Sugriva, a merciful person like Dasaratha — why have not such characters been created in world literature?" (*How noble that literature is — which does not have this kind of characters!*)

Protesting a little bit against the untouchability and caste distinctions present in Hindu society, Pratapa Reddy explained the reason for the sustenance of morality in such a society. "Though slavery to foreign rule has been there for over a thousand years, the reason for the sustenance of qualities of justice among Hindus is Srimad *Ramayana*! Despite the absence of a tradition of teaching illiterates, women, untouchables and so called low castes, the reason for the emergence of moralist behaviour is the miracle of Srimad *Ramayana*" (p. 6).

★ Pratapa Reddy, Suravaram. 1943. *Ramayana Viseshalu*. (Reprinted from Vibhuti). Hyderabad: Golconda Patrika Kaaryaalayam.

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"I feel that the original *Ramayana*, the existence of Rama and Valmiki was prior to 1400 BC, perhaps about 2500 BC" (p. 23).

In this book, Pratapa Reddy elaborately discussed his views on Interpolations in *Ramayana*, period of Valmiki, the periods of important incidents, social customs, the means of transport of those days, war tactics, examination of Aryan land, Lanka and Kishkindha, non-Aryan tribes, etcetera.

At every place, he too attempted to protect the respect of Valmiki by pushing under the carpet of Interpolations such issues which appear mutually contradictory throughout *Ramayana*.

There is something wrong in fixing the time of Rama's birth and the location of planets, he says. Would Valmiki commit such a blunder? Then why did this mistake take place? Valmiki surely would not have made it. This must be an act of some subsequent foolish poet. — This is his opinion throughout.

"At many places in *Ramayana*, Valmiki cited issues concerning Astrology. Why did he, then, miss to describe here in detail? Is this an Interpolation? Let modern Astrologers decide!", he said (p. 40). Even, what can they decide? 'When such a blunder occurred in telling the time of Rama's birth, what will it be other than Interpolation? Did Valmiki not know Astrology?', they would say.

This is all right, but did the poet of Interpolations not know Astrology? In fact, people of subsequent generations know any 'science' better than their predecessors. That science would develop further in subsequent periods only. There is more scope for Valmiki to commit more mistakes in Astrology than his successors.

Regarding the age of Rama, he mentioned words of Kausalya and also what Sita said to Ravana. The two views are incoherent, according to him. Then what should he do? He has to push one of the two under the carpet of Interpolations. He did the same thing everywhere. "We may say that words of Sita Devi are Interpolations and a creation of subsequent poets" (p. 40). — Have you observed? Interpolations every where!

Concerning non-vegetarian food, methods of cooking and preserving meat, he discussed elaborately based on the internal evidence of the story. "Thus, in *Ramayana*, people of all castes used to consider meat holy and tasty and had it....It is evident that people of that time used to relish cows, bulls, goats, forest pigs, bisons, spotted deer, peacocks, hens, iguanas, sea fish, prawns, rabbits, tortoise and other animals" (p. 50). Brahmins too relished all these kinds of meat! 'People of all castes' used to eat these dishes.

While leaving for forest life, Rama says to his mother, "Abandoning meat, I will eat bulbs and roots like ascetics"! However, he eats meat in his exile life. Because of this, it amounts to Rama speaking a lie or Valmiki committing a mistake. Therefore, Pratapa Reddy says, "It is clear that either meat eating by Rama or relevant descriptions must be an Interpolation." If it is necessary to defend the reputation of Rama and Valmiki, he does not hesitate at all to push any part of the story or any incident under the carpet of Interpolations.

Almost all scenes in *Ramayana*, which tell about meat, relate to Rama only. Rama telling his mother that he would not eat meat, Sita's promise to river Ganga that she would offer liquor and meat; Rama hunting animals after crossing Ganga, offering meat of antelope to the new house at Chitrakuta, Rama and Sita eating mutton pieces before Bharata's arrival at Chitrakuta, Bharadwaja giving a feast with meat to Bharata, Sita telling Ravana that her husband went to get meat; Kabandha informing Rama about fish in lake Pampa, Vali asking Rama as to why Rama killed him since people do not eat meat of monkeys — Thus there are scenes related to Rama eating meat throughout *Ramayana*. If some one assumes all these scenes as Interpolations and delete them, then there will not be any scenes of meat. Then, Pratapa Reddy will perhaps conclude thus, "No one used to eat meat during *Ramayana* period." Unless they give up the attitude of throwing every fault onto Interpolations, even good critics cannot understand the nature of *Ramayana*.

This author, who adores Rama, very naturally, has much negative opinion of Kaika. Also of her parents. However, he is also admitting Kaika's right over Kosala kingdom. However, he argues that it was wrong on the part of Kaika's father to ask Dasaratha that his daughter must get it.

"King Kekaya, who received Dasaratha's kingdom as *ooli,* (money or wealth given by the bridegroom to the parents of a bride), seems to be a selfish fellow. His daughter too acquired the same character deeply" (p. 53). Daughter inherited father's selfishness, the critic says! He did not find any selfishness in Dasaratha, an aged man, marrying a young girl. However, this critic could see great selfishness in her father who made some arrangement for his daughter! To project how wicked Kaika was, he pointed to the words of Bharata, as if saying, "See how Kaika's son himself talked about his mother."

When messengers go for Bharata after the death of Dasaratha, without knowing the happenings at Ayodhya, Bharata asks the messengers, "How is my mother, who is an angry and wicked woman?" These words of Bharata appealed a lot to Pratapa Reddy. He has no question as to why Bharata should get angry at his mother without knowing about the happenings in Ayodhya." Moreover, Bharata's words are not interpolations! In his view, it is an episode, which Valmiki wrote beautifully. No question about this.

He observes that: There were dogs, donkeys and rugs among the gifts, which Kaika's father gave to Dasaratha and Bharata. Indians do not have the custom of giving dogs and donkeys as gifts. Presenting rugs is a practice of the people of cold countries. Therefore, if we go by what the poet said, king Kekaya must have belonged to Iran. Pratapa Reddy's criticism proceeded with a hint that Kaika did not behave like a noble woman since she did not hail from India. All the critics who have a negative attitude towards Kaika make the same kind of criticism — that Kaika must have been from some distant country and hence she is so wicked! If distant country people are wicked in our view, we too will appear wicked to those distant country people, won't we? This argument cropped up from the arrogance, "Our country is great. We are noble. The people of other countries are not so noble." As they do not find any reason to abuse Kaika, they take revenge by showing some reason like, "She came from a distant country. Women of that country behave like that only. Wooden-headed kind of people!" All these indirect short cut arguments are meant for only those who have no strength of justice. If women of Iran are as courageous as Kaika, what a great country that country is!

Concerning Rama's vow of commitment to one wife, he discussed some points, as all other critics did. "From this it is clear that Rama had other wives apart from Sita and Bharata too had many wives." Having doubted so at one place, he said at another place thus, "Do we have to say all these descriptions are Interpolations?.... We cannot say. Anyway, according to the traditional public opinion, there is no doubt that there is more evidence to say that Rama and his brothers were committed to the vow of one wife only." (p. 54). Thus, he abandoned all his doubts.

Pratapa Reddy observed that,.during the period of *Ramayana*, women enjoyed great freedom. While Sita was going to the forest, all the people of Ayodhya saw her and thought, "Sita — whom the spirits that roam in sky too could not see so far — such Sita is now appearing before all people!" After reporting this, he again tells us that although people felt like that, women were not in such a bad situation. "During those days, royal women had life in harems. This, however, does not mean that they were not in a horrible situation having been confined to veil and not seen by the sun or men. They used to observe and follow rules of the life of a harem as far as it was necessary in accordance with their high position and respect."

Life in the harem as far as it was necessary for maintaining the respect of women! He opines it was necessary to some extent. Who will decide the limit? On what basis do they decide? He has dismissed poet's words, "Sita who did not appear to even *spirits* appeared now." He has realized that it is not a matter of fame for *Ramayana* if women were kept behind the veil. With an intention to tell that *Ramayana* let women very free he said, "It does not seem that harem life was not so hard." Whatever 'seemed' to him, he brushed it aside. Hence, he told that harem life was not that difficult.

To show that women were free in *Ramayana*, he cited an example. He asked us to note how much freedom and liberty Rama gave to women. His words: "In the event of danger, when they face hardships, in the battle field, at the time of selecting bridegroom, it is not wrong if women appear before men. Moreover, Rama said a woman could appear before others with the permission of her husband when he is near her" (p. 55).

See how much freedom Rama gave! Women cannot appear on all occasions like men. Only on certain specified occasions. That too with the permission of the husband and only in his presence! This critic thinks it is a great freedom! With this view, he formulated that woman during *Ramayana* period were free! Well, how will 'stringent life in the harems' look like in his view?

Pratapa Reddy mentioned that, during the period of *Ramayana*, Brahmins had some privileges. One of them was: "During the period of *Ramayana*, money lending business was going on. Brahmins also joined that business. They had special advantages in their business. This advantage was denied to other castes. In case the borrower does not repay the debt, the Brahmin lender used to lie down on the floor at the door in front of the borrower's house, covering his face and without food. The fast used to continue until loan was cleared." (p.58).

Brahmins carrying on money lending business. Sitting in front of the borrowers and recovering the loans! This critic is feeling very happy by informing us that such facility was not available to other castes but is exclusive for Brahmins. It seems it did not strike to him that *Ramayana* would be defamed if this kind of information were revealed. Otherwise, he would have pushed this under the carpet of Interpolation.

Pratapa Reddy is dismissing all education and scholarship of Hanuman. "It is described that Hanuman was a great scholar and an expert in principles of grammar, commentaries, prosody, scriptures and all crafts. This description is causing suspicion about the scholarship of Hanuman. Grammar principles and commentaries came into existence only after **8th** century BC. They were not in vogue during Hanuman's period. Because of these Interpretations, it is not believable that he tried to speak to Sita in Sanskrit in *Sundara kanda*." (p. 60) (*What will happen to devotees of Hanuman?*)

Just as bribery is deep rooted and became a social malady today, even during those days bribery was in vogue. It seems that even ministers too appear to have accustomed to the taste of bribery.... We may suspect that this was a practice among Rakshasas. But even among Aryans there were people who used to take bribes." (p. 61) Why, then, do you call it a Rakshasa practice?

The critic is giving a reason as to why atheistic ideas crop up.

"Generally, atheism crops up during a religious transition period. When a new religion becomes rampant while condemning the old religion, the old religion loses its hold on people and the new religion does not yet secure hold and hence people fall under the influence of atheism." (p. 62)

This critic has understood the reason for atheism so beautifully!

"In the present day, before the soldiers of both the sides go for combat, wine, brandy are offered, band is played and sent them into the battle field. Even during *Ramayana* period, liquor was offered to the soldiers and made them ready. Such liquor had the name 'Viira Paanam". (Warrior drink). (p. 65).

All this is mere information. He has no criticism about making soldiers drink and keep them ready for death. Nowhere do we find a thought that is useful to people!

Narrating about sending spies into the enemy troops and making secret battles, he concluded, "....However, all these are acts of Rakshasas." (p. 65). Did Rama not wage a secret battle against Vali? Did Rama not mention about spies? Will there be more Rakshasa acts than closing eyes without seeing truth?

He opines that Aryans alone knew archery and Rakshasas were not aware of it. "Except Indrajit and Ravana, none else knew archery. Whether they too knew it or it might be poet's description!.....One evidence to say that Aryans alone had the skill of archery is that Rama single handedly killed Khara and his 14,000 Rakshasa soldiers." (p. 66). He was not sure whether Indrajit and Ravana knew archery! It is poet's creation, he thinks! However, Rama killing 14 thousand people is not poet's creation. It is not poet's description. It is literally true. All those things that are favourable to Aryans are truths. All those favourable to Rakshasas are lies.

To praise Aryans is his objective. (*From the view point of race this man belongs to Dravidian race!*)

"Without hesitation, we can say that it was Aryans who were Hindus that first discovered archery in the world." (p. 66)

"Civilization and culture of Aryans were predominant during *Ramayana* period. In the Aryans land... cities, towns and villages emerged in large numbers... The city of Ayodhya was almost as great as present day cities and had civilization... In Ayodhya there were buildings of several stories.... There were seven storied buildings....." (p. 67). In this manner, he reproduced the entire description of Ayodhya and asks us, "See how great the Aryan cities are!" The devotees of Aryans receive Ayodhya as the poet described. They are not concerned with Lanka. Devotees of Dravidians receive all the descriptions of Lanka and are not concerned with Ayodhya! Devotees of both sides do not understand that both descriptions are exaggerations and it is the way of narrating mythology.

Pratapa Reddy's reverence for Valmiki *reached even the Sun.*

"On seeing through telescope it has been proved that there are spots in the Sun. Valmiki was not unaware of this much! Valmiki made Rama say, 'Lakshmana! A black spot is seen in the sun, you see!'..." (p. 68). Then why do we need a telescope? It is not necessary! Devotees of Rama do not have any use of it.

"It is not necessary to doubt whether Palmistry was in practice during *Ramayana* period. This science is linked with Astrology. It was only Hindus who first discovered Palmistry." (p.69). *O I see! So, it was Hindus who spread this itch across the world!*

"We need to say once again that it was Hindus who first used medicines in treating people. Our people were aware of Visalya karani, Suvarna karani, Sandhana karani and Sanjiva karani. But it is doubtful if they were aware of Sanjiva karani." (p. 70).

All these are the names of the medicinal plants in the mountain of medicines which Hanuman brought flying. All these are imagined names for the sake of mythology. Devotees of Rama believe every piece in the story and keep clinging to it. *Sanjiva karani* is a medicine that makes a dead person regain his life. If they claim that they knew, people will ask them to make the dead alive. As it is not possible, he is escaping by admitting that it is doubtful. However, our people knew very well about the rest, he claims.

As Aryans intended to spread their culture toward the south of Ganga, sages like

Bharadwaja, Atri and Agastya set up their hermitages here and there in the south and they seem to be interested in spreading Aryan religion and culture… In *Ramayana*, it is clearly mentioned that Agastya went towards south in order to punish and annihilate wicked people in the south." (p. 73)

There were wicked people in the south. These noble men have to come and punish them. Whatever they say in *Ramayana*, this man praises! On the one hand, he says that Aryans arrived out of kindness and affection to teach their great culture to the southerners who were in ignorance and on the other hand, he says they had come to punish the wicked! So, they kick, hit, wage battles, kill and teach their culture! How kind they were!

'There is no difference between Rakshasa morality and Aryan morality. Valmiki expressed the same kind of political morality through *every body's mouth*.' (p. 78). Just because the poet said that there was no difference between Rakshasa morality and Aryan morality, it is surprising to note that this man admits it!

Observe some views of this writer concerning the nature of the characters of *Ramayana* story!

About Kaika: "In the beginning she was not selfish…Thereafter, she became fickle minded… I have also informed the reason that she is from Persia (Iran)… I have informed the readers that Kaika's parents too were harsh. The daughter acquired their mentality." (p. 94).

About Rama: "This man is the foremost among world heroes. Rama's noble qualities revealed themselves at the time of coronation as a prince….. Meanwhile thunderbolt like news! He did not express joy when coronation was proposed nor he is depressed now (at the time of cancellation)…" says Pratapa Reddy.

As it does not look nice to say that Rama did not at all cry, see how skilfully he defends Rama. If you ask, "Well, does Rama have only self-restraint and does he not have natural human quality of feeling sad in difficult times?", it is also there. He knows pretty well, before whom he should exhibit self-restraint, grace and serenity. He exhibited it for a long time in front of his mother. But how long?.... On seeing his mother's grief, he was unable to withstand it and cried. This is before his intimate people. Next time, while taking leave from his father, he exhibited self-restraint, calmness and serenity" (p. 90). This critic has not found it strange to see Rama crying inside and showing serenity outwardly! Moreover, he defends Rama thus, 'Do you think Rama is not a human being? He is a human being!"

".....During forest life, he was never angry with his father", says the critic. Mr. Pratapa Reddy, recall a little as to what had happened on the bank of Ganga.

"Only when deep sorrow overpowered him, couple of times he slipped his tongue, 'now, Kaika will be happy!' If it were some one else who requested to come back to rule the kingdom, he would have accepted. Rama did not do so… But killing of Vali is not very much defendable." (*Defendable to certain extent?*)

Once, Rama sat Lakshmana on his thigh out of affection! He let off Ravana scott-free first time without killing him!(*Though killed him second time, letting of scot-free first time is kindness!*) This is how eulogy of Rama went on. Finally, the eulogy ended with the remark, "Ravana is a great warrior. None was there to equal him."

About Lakshmana: "This man does not have as much self-restraint as Rama has. He loves Rama's nobility a lot. Hence he became a servant to him…. Others may take a detailed look at Rama but if Lakshmana gets angry, it is difficult to resist him" (p. 92). A while ago Rama is a great hero! Now Lakshmana is a greater hero!

About Bharata: Mentioning how well Bharata scolded his mother, Pratapa Reddy praised him as a noble man. "He knows the nature of his mother… People did not have good opinion of him. However, after knowing his intentions people began respecting him. Rama, in their first meeting, sat Bharata on his thigh and expressed his intense love.... Bharata too became an ascetic, sat near the sandals of Rama and ruled virtuously." (p. 94)

About Satrughna: "Not a well known man. Good man but not a warrior.... He seems to be a person who says, "Command me, your Excellency!" (p. 94). Well, what about Lakshmana, Mr. Pratapa Reddy? Has he not appeared like a person who says, "I am your slave, your lord!"

Rama has a slight opinion of Satrughna, isn't it? So his devotees too have a slight opinion of him.

About Hanuman: "He is the most reliable servant of Rama who does two things if asked to do one thing. Very great intelligent man. Humble person. Rich in humility. A great scholar in Sanskrit. Knows many languages." (p. 95). (*A while ago, he said Hanuman does not know Sanskrit. How does he become such a Sanskrit scholar in such a short while?*)

About Sita: "A great devoted wife. Her name is the noblest spell (*mantra*) to Indian women... Her courage and patience are praiseworthy." (p. 95).

About Ravana: "Terror to enemies. Lustful man. Possesses a thousand wives.... Did not subject Sita to forceful sex. In Rakshasa marriages, they used to give one year time to those women who do not agree for the marriage. He gave the same dead line to Sita also. (*The poet did not say that this tradition was there among Rakshasas. There are instances when Ravana forcefully molested those women who did not agree. Only to say that 'Sita is still pure", this writer brought in about this convention.*) Aryans condemned molestation than any thing. Repentance to Ravana is inevitable." (p.96)

About Vibhishana: "Since his brother was an immoral man he had to seek refuge in Rama. He was born among Rakshasas by mistake. Very calm person. Man of justice and morals." (p.96)

About Vasista: "In *Ramayana*, Vasista appears to be a useless *Panchanga* (religious calendar) priest. He does not solve the problem of Dasaratha. Not condemns Kaika (Not abuses). (*Imagine how Pratapa Reddy would have abused Kaika if he were Dasaratha's priest!*) We do not find Vasista's importance." (p. 97)

Pratapa Reddy discussed the knowledge of Geography of Puranic (old Mythological) authors. He says: Puranics had very good knowledge of Geography. People of the subsequent period did not have so much knowledge! "Our Puranics had mistaken Yakshas, Rakshasas, Kinneras, Nagas, Vanaras and other races as non-human spirits and animals. However, the Puranics of the early days did not have this illusion. As the subsequent Puranics did not have as much knowledge of Geography as the earlier Puranics, they made such a mistake." — This is what we call 'backward movement of the cart'! Pratapa Reddy's cart puts its face forward but moves backwards. If the earlier generation knew every thing, their knowledge should be available to the new generations, shouldn't it? Has time been passing from Valmiki to us, or going from here to Valmiki? This writer must settle this issue first. The knowledge of earlier people would not go anywhere. It would reach the later generations. Moreover, this knowledge accompanied by the new experiences would develop further. This means later generations would have more knowledge than the earlier generations. But, if we look at this critic, it does not appear that his knowledge has increased compared to the knowledge of the predecessors. This is surprising!

He is praising a lot the knowledge of Geography of Valmiki. He discussed extensively how places, paths and directions mentioned in *Ramayana* are aptly corresponding with the present day Geographic conditions. If all these details correspond exactly, it means that the poet had written very carefully about the places.

Many aspects of these details are noteworthy.

Hampi of Bellary district was Kishkindha. — He supported this argument.

He searched the entire globe for Lanka and as he was unable to locate it, he finally admitted, "I don't know!" See how Pratapa Reddy searched for Lanka: According to the story of *Ramayana*, Lanka should be in the south of Kishkindha. Hanuman had to go from Mahendragiri of Vindhya Mountains to Lanka, which was 100 yojanas away. If we assume Bellary as Kishkindha, Vindhya Mountains are not in the south but in the north. Those bloody Vindhya Mountains are located at only one place and nowhere else! As he could not say that Hanuman started from those Vindhya Mountains, Pratapa Reddy started searching for another mountain in the south. He found Mahendragiri in Orissa. That is in the east and not in the south of Kishkindha (Bellary). When he looked if there was any country in the south of that mountain, he found Ceylon. He got a doubt whether Hanuman went to this Ceylon. However, to go to Ceylon, one can go very comfortably from Rameswaram! Why flying from the hills of Orissa? Leaving Ceylon, when he wanted to see if he would find any country at a distance of 100 yojanas from Orissa, he saw Islands of Andaman and Nicobar in the east. There every thing was tribal in nature and he did not find any country like Lanka with gold mansions. According to Valmiki's narration, Rama reached Mahendragiri in one day when he started with the army from Kishkindha. Is it possible to walk from Bellary to Orissa in one day? If Mahendragiri was at a distance where people could reach in one day and if Lanka was at a distance of 100 yojanas from there, do they need crores of Vanaras to seize it? — After raising questions like this and as these questions did not have any coherence, he was vexed and finally said, "Then where is Lanka? Well, I do not know!" (p. 112)

Direction which the poet mentioned, the mountain which the poet named, the hundred yojanas which the poet given, the golden mansions which the poet depicted — every thing should correspond! Only then, one can locate Lanka. If this is the way of searching Lanka, none can find it in this world. Because it is merely mythology. Just as crossing of the sea by the Vanaras flying is a myth, Kishkindhas, Lankas and everything is a myth. The surprising thing is that all the pundits believed these myths wholly and they search intensely as if those countries really exist somewhere. However, where will they find a non-existing country of golden mansions, except in stories?

He narrated in greater detail as how an English scholar, a German scholar and other foreign scholars praised *Ramayana* of Hindus as a great work. As foreigners praised it, *Ramayana* is greater work than before.

He says *Ramayana* occupies the very first place among the famous, beautiful works of all times and all countries! Other foreign scholars too gave the same opinion, he says!

Finally, he concluded with the following eulogy: "As we read this kind of holy book, our joy exceeds. Natural descriptions, beautiful ideas, noble moral behaviour of *Ramayana* are ideals to be cherished not only for the Hindus but to the people of the world who wish Dharma (virtue)! Such an epic has not been created so far not only in Sanskrit but also in any language of the world. This Valmiki *Ramayana* has been proclaiming the culture, civilization, greatness of ideas, noble values, poetic talent and merit of Hindus in all ages and in all countries. It will continue to proclaim hereafter also." (p. 98).

Well, sir, you cannot say about future!

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[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

5. Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Chowdary's 'Murder of Sambuka'★

Murder of Sambuka is a play.

In his preface to this play, Mr. Ramaswamy (hereafter Ramaswamy) explained 'how Hindu country (India) was during the period of the story of *Ramayana*'. He observed that Aryans came to India "from the land of north Kuru race" and at that time 'all the Adivasis (aboriginals, tribal people) in India were not a single race.' These tribal people were referred to as Dasyas in the earlier texts like Vedas; as Rakshasas in Puranas, Naitiyas and some epics and Dravidians and Sudras in *Smritis*", he explained. (Ramaswamy's Granthika variety of Telugu is very difficult.)

Referring to battles between Aryans and Dravidians, he informs us "Puranas depicted these battles as *Devadanava* (Gods and Rakshasas) battles."

Ramaswamy praised the rule of Aryan kings as follows: "During this period Aryans achieved extraordinary skill and expertise in political matters.... strategy expanded. They did not hesitate to achieve their wishes even by using crooked tactics (*Kautilyam*). Even for sages, protection of the kingdom became the ultimate goal. Individuals perished and everything was concentrated in the hands of the king.... Aryans stopped roaming the country for the sake of livelihood and established villages. Every village turned into a town. The kings formed different states and ruled for the welfare of the people....without the fear of prostitution (*jaara*) and theft (*chora*), all the states were ever green...While North India was in this situation, Sri Ramabhadra sat on the throne of Saketapura." (p. 24)

This writer has boundless reverence for the rule of Aryan kings. For him, Rama is Sri Ramabhadra. Or Sri Ramachandra!

We have already seen how autocratic was the rule of kings in the words of Dasaratha and Rama. If we assume Dasaratha as Aryan king, according to Valmiki, there were 'prostitutes' under the rule of Aryan kings Dasaratha, Bharata and Rama. But, Ramaswamy dismissed prostitution and out did Valmiki in praising the glory of the rule of Aryan kings. On the one hand using *Kautilyam* (crooked politics) and on the other had ruling in favour of people! Those kingdoms, where there were 'beggars' even, were ever green! Except composing the words like 'Jara' (prostitution) and 'Chora' (theft), he is not concerned with facts.

Ramaswamy has reverence not only for Ramabhadra. He has equal reverence for Ravanabhadra also! His reverence for Ravana is as follows: "This man is a great valorous and mighty person. Extraordinarily handsome. Extremely courageous. He has no equals in his devotion to Siva. Lord of justice.... When Vedas were like confused jungles he made path-breaking attempts to enable people recite them. It is still available under the name *'Ravana Bhattiyam'*. Not only courageous but highly enlightened (*Brahma gnani*). This is why, after killing Ravana, a great sin of killing a Brahman troubled Rama. In addition to this, Ravana was a worshipper of nine crore Siva temples" (p.30).

★ Ramaswamy Chowdary, Tripuraneni. 1920. *Sambuka Vadha*. Tenali: Sarala publications, 1971.

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This is how eulogy of Ravana goes on. This means, he has reverence not only for Aryan kings but also Dravidian kings. Only towards Brahmins he does not have reverence. This play proceeds along these lines.

At the beginning of the play, Angada is seen coming to Ayodhya from Kishkindha. Arguing that Vanaras were not monkeys, Ramaswamy made Angada a human being. This human being, however, knew the Gandharva skill of flying in the sky. While coming to Ayodhya, Angada thinks like this: "Oh, my god! Where is Kishkindha and where is Saketapura? I have to come from river Thungabhadra to river Sarayu. *Just as madness is of thousand varieties*, why should I try to come walking? Why don't I travel via sky way by means of Gandharva skill? What is there to enjoy on seeing Aryan rural folk?"

Angada walked the journey with a view to see Aryan villages, otherwise this human Angada could have happily come flying in the sky. The human Angada knew not only this flying but also the miraculous skill of disappearing! Rama has splendid love for Vanaras. Because of this love, he presented them various kinds of miraculous powers.

According to this story, Angada might have had some unfavourable attitude towards Rama. He had a suspicion that Rama might be trying to bring gradually Vanara kingdom under his control. "Under some pretext, he might have called me. (*This means, Rama called Angada and he was going to Ayodhya!*) On observing all this, it appears that he is misleading us to take Vanara kingdom under his possession.... He is gradually snatching away our independence."

On his way, he heard about Sambuka from Sambuka's disciple and went to his hermitage. There, introducing himself, he told Sambuka that Sugriva had sent him to console Rama on the occasion of his separation from Sita. "....On hearing the calamity that happened suddenly to Pattabhi Rama, the crown king of Vanara kingdom has sent me."

At one place, he says Rama himself called him! At another place, he says that Sugriva has sent him to console Rama! Two reasons simultaneously! It is extremely difficult to understand how stupid these scholars will be!

Then, referring to Sambuka's penance, Angada asks, "*Swami* (Sir!)! Performing meditation and penance are activities of Brahmins, aren't they? The king defends the rules of caste system, doesn't he? Will he keep quiet?"

"Will Sri Ramachandra not know what is good and what is not? Will his sword fall on the throat of an innocent one like me?" says Sambuka.

Again Angada says, "Swami! Sri Ramachandra on his own may not resort to this kind of unethical act but will the Brahmins not force him to do so? Will they not preach to Sri Ramachandra that this is a matter of "punishing the wicked and protecting the good? They will make Sri Ramachandra instrumental."

This means, Rama is a very noble man! Brahmins are wicked. Observe through out this play how the views of this writer proceed with regard to Brahmins and Sri Rama!

Next, from the conversation between Rama and Vasista:

Vasista: "Today the entire town of Ayodhya is filled with whispers and anger."

Rama: "What is the reason?"

"Have you ever heard the name of Sambuka?"

"It does not seem that it *touched our ears*!"

"He is a non-Aryan. That is a non-Brahmin. That is, a Dravidian! That is a Sudra as our *Smritis* (Codes) referred to."

"So what?"

"Nothing. Listen calmly.... Today, Sambuka is going to build a hermitage very close to Saketapura, gather disciples from among non-Brahmins, defy Smritis and preach them. Not stopping there, he is going to send his students to towns and other places and preaching Sudras that they are equal to Aryans."

"Is it not proper that all our subjects have equal rights?"

How are Rama's answers? What does he mean by equal rights when there have been caste distinctions for a long time in the kingdoms of his father and forefathers! Is it not because of the absence of such rights that Sambuka was defying old rules for the sake of rights? Though he knew that Sambuka was defying the existing rules and organising a movement demanding equal rights on a par with Aryans, will Rama say, "All people should have equal rights, shouldn't they?" From where did this socialist Rama come in the period of *Ramayana*? Is Ramaswamy not aware that Rama was an Aryan king, that he became hostile to Dravidians and waged battles and that he was determined to destroy Rakshasas? Will such Rama say he would give equal rights to Sudras (Dravidians) under his rule?

See later.

"Will you not protect the customs of caste system?" Vasista says to Rama as if Rama must decide the matter now itself.

"I am determined to protect them!" says Rama. He says he would maintain caste distinctions and give equal rights to all people! What is this great magic?

Rama says he would make a new law to impose harsh punishments on those who defy rules of caste system.

Vasista argues that there is no use with laws and such things. He insists on imposing death penalty on Sambuka.

Then, Sri Rama was surprised, according to the writer. "Sri Rama was surprised and said, 'It is not proper on your part to talk like this and it is not proper on my part to hear. Why so many arguments? I cannot hear. This hand — which is well versed in punishing wicked people — cannot slay an innocent." Thus Rama turns his head away.

Mr. Ramaswamy! You are making Sri Ramabhadra utter so many great morals. How could this moralist kill innocent Vali? Have you not heard Vali's story? Did it not *touch* your *ears*? Valmiki might not have found any thing wrong in Rama killing Vali but did you also not find any thing wrong in it? You are giving evidence as if Rama did not commit a single mistake and he had not harmed innocents! To criticise Brahmins, is it necessary to defend Rama so much?

While Rama was talking to Vasista, a Brahmin brought his son and said that his son died.

Human Angada, who was sitting nearby in a disappeared form, saw all this. "Oh, my god! What is this conspiracy? What a tactful man Vasista is! Is this the reason for Vasista's whispering yesterday evening with Aswini gods? Gods of the earth and of the sky colluded", Angada was surprised.

Vasista talks confidentially with Aswini gods and made that boy regain consciousness. If it is necessary to make the boy regain consciousness, the writer could describe that Brahmins relieved the boy from the faint. Should the writer bring in Aswini gods from the sky?

On the insistence of Vasista, Sri Rama finally agrees, "I cannot oppose your words. I will carry out your command."

Immediately he sends a letter to Sambuka. Its summary: I heard that you are reading Vedas by defying the code and demanding equal rights with Brahmins. Tomorrow we will hold an assembly to decide whether you have that right or not. If you have rejected the principles of the Smritis, death punishment will be inevitable to you. Come to the assembly tomorrow and prove your right.

On reading the king's letter Sambuka thinks it is futile to go to the assembly. It is Sambuka's feeling that sages preached some partisan morals in the Smritis for their own benefit and to harm Sudras and he would get justice only if Vedas are taken as standard.

After reading Rama's letter Sambuka says to his disciple, "Who will listen to our prayer that Smritis are not acceptable to us since they were written by the opponents? What solution is there in the assembly? They do not accept

Vedas as standard. We do not accept Smritis as standard. We will be punishable." Hence, he says, it is no use to go to the assembly. The same he writes to the king. "I will attend the assembly if you consider Vedas as standard… otherwise….", he says he would not come. Sambuka has lot of reverence for the Vedas.

That great king does not get angry at Sambuka's refusal. Such a nice fellow! Moreover, he feels extremely sorry for he was obliged to kill Sambuka. "Oh! Ruling a kingdom is a dangerous feat! I am obliged to kill good people — who have not committed even a little wrong — in the name of customs of caste system!... The family priest will feel annoyed if I do not punish Sambuka!.... I have to rule the kingdom by cutting the throat of philosophers!" (*I cannot rule the kingdom by doing such deeds*), Rama feels sad.

The family priest may feel annoyed if I do not kill Sambuka, says Rama! This means Rama will yield to that 'annoyance'! Such a Rama is a great lord of justice in the view of Ramaswamy!

He would like to project Rama as a great man of justice! He ought to show that he killed Sambuka! Owing to this kind of contradiction, the play has become so haphazard and inconsistent.

If the writer understood the trouble that there is no difference between Rama's ideas and Brahmins' ideas, this play would not have been like this.

See the subsequent story.

Later, Rama goes to Sambuka's hermitage. There, a disciple of Sambuka, while putting a plant in the ground, tells Rama, "The other day, when sage Kanva came to visit our teacher, he gave this *Somalata*."

Kanva is also a Brahmin. The writer is telling that all Brahmins have grudge against Sambuka. Why, then, Brahmin sages keep coming to Sambuka's hermitage? In Valmiki *Ramayana*, did we not read how happy Agastya felt when Sambuka died? Has this writer intended to tell us that only some Brahmins have grudge against Sambuka while others are favourable? If he wanted to show like this, why should he find fault with all Brahmins? Why should he give value to Vasista's words?

Then Rama goes to Sambuka. He sits in front of Sambuka and talks with him with reverence and humility. "As Sudras have no permission either to read or touch Vedas, they also have no permission to give religious lectures. They ought to accept the morals, which Brahmins tell them and should not question. This is their argument. (*'Their' means 'of the sages'. As if it is not his argument!*) What is your reply to that argument?" Rama asks Sambuka with humility.

"How does the word 'Sudra' apply to us? Why do you attach that label to us? We are Dravidians…. What is that Dharma which forcefully taken away from us common human rights? What sort of moral it is?.... Is presenting ignorance as a reward for calling ourselves Hindus?" This is how Sambuka argues for rights."

Sri Rama likes this argument. He is a virtuous man, isn't he?.... "Perform penance as you wish…. But do Vedas agree for this?", he asks.

Does Rama not know whether Vedas agree to it and what is there in Vedas?

Valmiki's Rama read all the Vedas. Ramaswamy's Rama does not seem to be a literate. He is asking a Sudra about what is there in Vedas!

Sambuka responded, "Vedas were formed as salvation to Hindus. I am sorry, I am wrong. They are salvation for the entire human kind." This means Vedas gave the same kind of rights to all human beings and did not do injustice to any one.

Fully satisfied with Sambuka's words, Rama said he would give equal rights to all in his kingdom. "O sage! Your words seem to be convincing. As it is my duty to give rights equally to all and rule impartially, rest assured. I will go", Rama came out of the hermitage.

By the time Rama returned, Vasista was ready. "You have punished the traitor, haven't you?"

Rama returned to the beginning of the argument again.

Vasista became furious and shouted at Rama, "Do you disobey your teacher?"

Sri Ramachandra is not perturbed. Moreover he gave a long lecture on how to love non-Aryans. "Will it be politics to keep another race in slavery and ignorance for the sake of prosperity of one race?", he asked angrily.

In which furnace did Ramaswamy *forge* this noble Rama? According to *Ramayana* story, after killing Sambuka, Rama wages battles against some kingdoms and present them to his brothers. The story *of Sambuka* as well as the battles are from 'Uttara kanda'. Whereas Ramaswamy turned Rama noblest human being in the episode of Sambuka! He makes Rama deliver great speeches on ruling people fairly, on equal rights and on the unity of races. But according to Valmiki's story, Rama invades Gandharvas subsequently, destroys them and seizes their country. He seizes some more countries.

When Rama was going to behave like this in future, why should Ramaswamy, make Rama give lectures on loving other races? Why, in fact, did Angada think negatively about Rama in the beginning itself? "To occupy Vanara empire.... he is taking away our freedom daily and gradually", says Angada. In this play Angada is not a bad character. He is a good character. He is a good character siding Sambuka. The writer made such a good character say that Sri Rama was attempting to occupy other kingdoms. After narrating the story like this, he made Sri Rama a noble person and said he loved all races.

Vasista felt irritated at the lecture on Dharma by Sri Rama. (*Why does not one get irritation at Rama's boastful words?*)

"Will it be politics to give equal rights to a defeated race. (Dravidian race)?" Vasista got angry.

Even then Rama, without heeding to Vasista, sang the same old song. "Whatever you say, my mind is not inclined to kill Sambuka. It is my belief that he is innocent". But he did not say, "I told Sambuka to go ahead with his penance peacefully. I will not violate my word." Rama himself has forgotten that he gave that word. He is saying that his mind is not inclined to kill Sambuka.

It did not strike to Vasista as to what to do.

It did not strike to Ramaswamy either as to what to do. If he makes Rama such a nice man, *Murder of Sambuka* will not take place. Then, he will not find any way to abuse Brahmins. If he wants to abuse Brahmins, *Murder of Sambuka* must take place. The story must proceed as Rama killed Sambuka to make Brahmins happy. Therefore, Ramaswamy suddenly changed Rama's character. He convinced Rama — who has so far played the role of a noble man — to agree unconditionally to carry out the task. All the while he blew up the goodness of Rama disproportionately and pushed him at once into vileness.

Rama thought for himself, "To some extent doubt is cleared." How was his doubt cleared? Vasista said, 'Why equal rights to defeated race?" With this Rama's doubt is cleared. This means Rama thought thus, "Yes. It is true. We have to kill defeated races. Why rights for them? So far, I have not thought about it properly." He also thought, "If killing Sambuka is not fair, why does this great man (Vasista) insist so much?" Rama came to the conclusion that it was right since Vasista said so.

Ramaswamy is eager to throw the entire blame on to Brahmins and make Ramabhadra a totally good man. 'It was Brahmins who got every thing done. Sri Ramachandra is not aware of any sin. He is innocent. Very pious man. Sea of mercy. He has agreed under compulsion. Otherwise, would he have done so?' — This is what the writer wanted to say.

Finally Rama says to Vasista as follows: "Oh, my teacher! The burden of discussing what is just and what is unjust, lies on the shoulders of the teacher! As I have to obey the teacher, I will make Sambuka to go to the other world." Saying so, he returned to Sambuka's cottage.

When he thought it was teacher's duty to teach what was good and what was bad, why did he argue so much with the teacher unnecessarily? The story must proceed in such a way that Vasista's words were convincing to Rama and Rama undertook the task willingly as he was convinced. Even then Rama would be a culprit. But, if Rama did it as per the teacher's order, though he was not willing, will it not be an insult to Rama's character? But the writer is not bothered about all this. He thought he was pointing out the wrong doing of Brahmins. He has not understood, that it would be Rama's mistake as well. Is it not an insult to Rama?

After that Rama went into the cottage to kill Sambuka. Sambuka's disciple utters words ridiculing Vasista. Then Vasista angrily says, "All those born in Lanka are Rakshasas. What is new in it?" — implying that, "All your Sudras are alike."

In reply to it, Sambuka's disciple says, "What you said is not true. Vibhishana, who was born in Lanka, is not Rakshasa.

This disciple is not a wicked character. Noble character. He talks on behalf of Sudras, that is Dravidians. This character agrees that 'All are Rakshasas in Lanka (that they are wicked and base) and says, "Vibhishana is a good man, isn't he?"

For Ramaswamy, all people in Lanka are base fellows, while Vibhishana alone is a good man!

When Vasista says, "All those born in Lanka are Rakshasas", the character of the other side should give some reply that defends the self-respect of Dravidians. Instead of saying so, is it a reply to say, "All are Rakshasas but Vibhishana is a good person." The writer simply feels happy that he is giving a reply but he is not bothered about the meaning of his reply and whom that reply defends.

Then Sri Ramachandra goes to Sambuka and raised his sword. "O my right hand! To you — who sent a fully pregnant royal woman to forests mercilessly (*perhaps his right hand alone sent Sita to the forest!*) — will it be difficult to take a life of a man even though he is a great sage? Will you be sympathetic?" (*Sympathy to the hand!*), Rama lamented.

Finally as it is inevitable for the story to proceed, good Rama remembered Smritis. "Rama is killing Sambuka", uttering his own name boastfully Rama cut Sambuka's head.

Rama — who assured Sambuka earlier to continue to do penance as he wished — if such Rama violated his assurance and did this — how base is that character?

Valmiki's Rama considered it a duty to protect principles of caste system and did the job, which he believed.

Ramaswamy's Rama turned into a puppet in the hands of others and became an incapable man who had to do the job, which he did not like.

Ramaswamy tried to decorate and improve Valmiki's Rama and make him nobler. But it turned into a proverb, *"When an artist wanted to draw the figure of a teacher it turned out into a monkey"*. He made this Rama as some one who is ignorant of Vedas and scriptures. He made him a coward who trembled with fear in the hands of ministers and priests! He made him a liar who could not stand on his word!

All this happened since he wanted to make Rama a great man and push the blame on to the Brahmins. Does Rama have no interest or selfishness in retaining caste distinctions and keeping Sudras as servants? Is Rama equally not responsible along with Brahmins in killing Sambuka?

Giving the title '*Murder of Sambuka*' and writing in favour of Sambuka means writing for the rights of Sudras, doesn't it? But, this writer, although he titled it so, all that he did in this play is eulogy of Aryan kings! Every thing that he showed is reverence for Sri Ramabhadra!

Defending Sambuka!

Defending the killer of Sambuka as well!

So far we have seen the play '*Murder of Sambuka*'.

Ramaswamy discussed some more points in his preface. We need to examine couple of those points here.

Hanuman, in order to search for Sita, starts from Kishkindha, flies for about 100 yojanas over the sea and reaches Lanka, doesn't he? Pundits have discussed this issue at length. If we examine this debate, it will be clear how sensibly these pundits have understood a mythological story!

Concerning Hanuman's flying, the points, which the pundits debated, are the following: What was the sea, which Hanuman crossed? Was Ravana's Lanka the same as the present day Sri Lanka that is in the South to India? Is the distance between Sri Lanka and India 100 yojanas?

Ramaswamy also discussed these points.

In fact, all the pundits do not consider the myths in Mythology as myths. They look at them as if they really occurred and the entire story is history. They try to discover the present location of all the places mentioned in the story. They calculate the distance in terms of the distance as the poet had mentioned them. If the calculations suit their arguments, they say, 'the poet has said correctly.' If their calculation does not match, they say, 'The poet did not know correctly about those places'. On the whole, in every incident, they pick up some aspects which the poet mentioned, leaving some and finally they drag the debate into confusion and stop there.

But it cannot be a great research if one searches for every myth in a mythology as per the descriptions. They will not find anything anywhere.

Take the golden deer. It is a myth. What did that deer do? What was its role? It helped Ravana to abduct Sita. If we convert that myth into reality, a human being has to do the job, which the deer did. If a man called Maricha takes Rama a little away from the cottage, rest of the story will proceed as before. (*If Maricha tells Rama that there are many fat animals in the forest at a particular location, Rama would surely run towards that spot. Later if Maricha cries imitating Rama's voice, Lakshmana too will run towards that spot. The story proceeds as usual.*)

We can convert any myth into reality in this manner.

Consider Jatayu. In the story, it is a huge bird. As this bird had to fight with Ravana for a while when he was abducting Sita, the poet created this bird as a huge one. The role, which this bird played, was to fight with Ravana, get wounded, inform Rama about the whole thing and to die.

Similarly we can convert the entire question concerning Hanuman crossing the sea into reality.

According to the story, the width of the sea, which Hanuman crossed, is 100 yojanas (*Nobody knows how much distance a yojana is. It is a term of mythology. Some people say we can call it 'Aamada' in Telugu. They also say one Aamada = 8 ½ miles. This means 100 yojanas = 850 miles. As per the story, we have to talk this distance in terms of a yojana only.*)

According to the geographic details, which Sugriva tell, when Hanuman starts for searching Sita, we find Vindhya Mountains. Next Southern zone, next the sea and thereafter Lanka — thus we get details indicating Southern part of India. This is why researchers began to search for Lanka from the Southern part of India.

Devotees who believe *Ramayana* as history consider Sri Lanka — which is located in the south of India — as Lanka which Ravana ruled. If we go by this, the Indian Ocean that lies between these two countries would be the sea, which Hanuman crossed.

But some critics do not accept this. Because: The width of the sea between India and Sri Lanka is only 23 ½ miles. If we see this in terms of yojanas, it is not even three yojanas. But the poet tells the width of the sea, which Hanuman crossed, was 100 yojanas. Therefore, these critics argue that it is not possible to consider present day Sri Lanka as Ravana's Lanka.

This means, these critics believe the distance of '100 yojanas' verbatim. But they do not believe that 'Lanka was located in the southern sea'. What they do is: They try to locate a 100-yojana width sea between any two places, and they call it the sea, which the poet described. And they say, Kishkindha is on one side and Lanka is on the other side.)

Again, we cannot say on which side of the Vindhya Mountains they find that sea. They must find it in the south only. This is again a problem.

Why should they believe the 100-yojana's distance as the poet describes it? If we believe it we should also believe 60 thousand years age of Dasaratha and the thousands of years of penance of sages, shouldn't we? We have to believe every thing: golden deer, Jatayu bird, Viradha and Kabandha.

As there is a golden deer in the story, shall we find any thing if we search for such deer?

Another argument concerning the width of the sea is as follows: Those who hold this argument do not believe 'the distance of 100 yojanas' which the poet described. They believe in only a place called Lanka. Since the poet told that Ravana ruled Lanka, which is in the South Sea, they believe the present day Sri Lanka as Ravana's Lanka of the past. Then, what about the 100-yojana width sea? It is not here? That sea is not here. To this, what they reply is: As the poet did not know correctly about the South, he thought that the width of the sea over there is so much.

Ramaswamy subscribes to the second argument. He does not believe 100 yojanas. He believes the present day Sri Lanka as Ravana's Lanka.

Why does he not believe this 100 yojanas distance? Not because, it is a myth. This belief is not similar to the disbelief about the 60 thousand years age of Dasaratha. Then why? It is because he believes Sri Lanka as Ravana's Lanka and there is no 100-yojana sea over there.

See what Ramaswamy says: "The island of Lanka should be eight hundred and fifty miles away from India. (*At the rate of 8 ½ miles per yojana, 850 miles for 100 yojanas.*) But, instead, it is twenty-three miles away. How to defend this difference?.... I am extremely sorry for arousing anger among Rama's devotees by commenting that great sage Valmiki was unaware of the south and committed a mistake as he heard from others." (Preface to '*Murder of Sambuka*').

This means, the poet had written wrongly as he was unaware of the distance between India and Lanka and as he heard from others!

If Valmiki knew about that distance correctly and if others told him correctly, would he have written the distance as 23 ½ miles? Would he have not written about 100 yojanas?

Even a stupid people knows how stupid this argument is. It is surprising as to why these pundits do not know about this!

Even if Valmiki knew about 23 ½ miles, he would not have written about it. Even then he would have written the distance as 100 yojanas. Because: This scene is created as a myth in order to show that Hanuman is a great hero. When the question, 'Who can cross the sea' arose, some Vanaras said that they could cross 10 yojanas. Some said 20 yojanas, some 30, and some 40. In this way, Jambavan reached the limit of 90. Angada said, 'I can cross 100 yojanas but cannot return. Finally, it becomes clear that only Hanuman was a hero who could cross 100 yojanas and return. — Did Valmiki write this scene just because he was unaware of the fact of 23 ½ miles? If he knew it, would he make Hanuman fly up to 23 ½ miles only? (*What sort of a great hero would be Hanuman if he flew up to 23 ½ miles? When the poet has to follow the reality of 23 ½ he has to stop making Hanuman fly and bring him down to the actual journey.*

Suppose the poet wrote as 100 yojanas since he was not aware of the distance. Well, then, did he also write about 'flying' since he was unaware of it? Do monkeys fly so much distance? The poet wrote as if kings and sages lived for thousands of years. Did he write all these things without being aware of the reality? Why did the poet write unnaturally about those things, which are obvious, from the point of view of common sense? Not because he was unaware of things. It is a method of writing in the form of mythology. The 'content' for this comes from the real life. But, the way the content is presented will be in the form of myths.

The description that Hanuman is a great hero who can fly over the sea and cross it — is a myth. The statement that the width of the sea is 100 yojanas is another myth. These two myths are compatible. It is foolish to bring in 23 ½ miles and argue about it.

Just as we do not find the golden deer and Jatayu birds, which the poet described, we will not find the distance, the places, seas, gods, Rakshasas, Kinneras and Kimpurushas, which the poet mentioned. In fact the present day pundits — who argue, "The poet wrote like this or like that since he is unaware of things" — do not know any thing. There is nothing, which the poet of those days can learn from these pundits!

This problem is not yet over. We need to ascertain about 'South Sea'.

Which is the sea that Hanuman crossed?

Vanaras who started towards south to search for Sita pushed into the cave '*swayam prabha*', came out and stood at the foot of Vindhya Mountain. There they saw at a distance a sea that was surging forward with high tides. It was at these Vindhya Mountains that Angada lay down in order to die. (*All this is in a link in this book.*) Then Sampati came and informed that 'Sita is in Lanka'. Then all Vanaras started towards the sea. Hanuman flew from there. — All this happened near Vindhya Mountain!

Why there is a sea near Vindhya Mountain? Or is it the sea in the west?

(*The present day Arabian Sea? Did Hanuman start at the edge of the western sea near Vindhya, travel in the sea along the western edge of India, turn from west to South and reach Lanka?*)

But it is not possible to think like this. Because, the poet very clearly said, 'Then (before Hanuman started) Vanaras stood on the northern bank of the south sea'. If the south sea is present day Indian Ocean, why is it near Vindhya Mountains? Is the entire area between Vindhya Mountains and Lanka a sea? Then what about '*Dakshina patha*', which should be next to Vindhya Mountains?

Ramaswamy discussed the matter with a view that Hanuman went until the end of south in India (*We may suppose, it is up to Kanyakumari*) and then started to Lanka. But it is wrong according to the story. In the story, Hanuman started flying from Vindhya Mountain. He has to calculate the width of the sea from there only. Without noticing this fact, how can we discuss the distance between India and Lanka?

There is no south sea near Vindhya. South sea is near *Kanyakumari*. But Hanuman flew near Vindhya only. He flew from there and landed on Lanka.

As Hanuman has to stand on the mountains and has to fly from that height, the poet started this scene from Vindhya only. When Hanuman flew, these mountains pressed down into the earth. Waters surged upwards. Here there is lot of descriptions. All this is necessary for the story.

If we look for the sea since the poet described the sea near Vindhya, we will not find it. We do not find places, rivers and seas in reality as they are described in the myths.

The entire research of Ramaswamy in search of south sea has become futile. He says he had to arouse anger among Rama's devotees because of his research. But, he is also a devotee of Rama, isn't he? He threw the crime of killing Sambuka on the Brahmins and did not allow *even a fly to sit on* (blame) Rama, did he? Who else is a greater devotee than him? ★

[Translation: **B.R. Bapuji**]

6. Muddukrishna's '*Asokam*'★

Mr. Muddukrishna (hereafter Muddukrishna) made critical comments of Valmiki *Ramayana* in his article 'Simhaavalookam' (Retrospection) and presented his 'new' approach in a play titled '*Asokam*'. These two are in the same book titled '*Asokam*'.

Muddukrishna's views in his essay

"While Valmiki portrayed Rama as a human being, some 'great men' corrected Valmiki's text and inserted extraordinary fiction into it." — This is how he proclaimed his reverence for Valmiki. (*Is this the beginning of wrong steps?*)

"Dasaratha yielded to his fond wife. Hence Rama was deprived of the kingdom", thus he agreed with Valmiki's opinion. Yet, he defied Valmiki by presenting Rama as an unkind and wicked man and Ravana as noble and lovable man.

His views on Lanka are as follows: "Making the city of Lanka as his capital, Ravana was ruling southern countries.... His tribesmen built many machines and airplanes with their scientific practice, became powerful and enjoyed them." (p. 89). It is Muddukrishna's opinion that science developed in Lanka during Ravana's time and the planes et cetera were the products of that science.

(*Until recently there were no airplanes anywhere in the world. This man is treating airplanes in a mythology called 'Ramayana' as scientific airplanes. What should we call this kind of Modernists? Should we call them 'traditional modernists' or 'modern traditionalists'?*)

Muddukrishna says that it was not wrong on the part of Ravana to take away Sita and he did so since carrying away a woman of his wish was the Dharma (a custom, a norm) of Rakshasa race.

"Sita's eyes were intoxicating. Ravana was madly in love with Sita. It was not wrong for Rakshasas to get a woman whom one loved. That is why he abducted her. Not out of base desire." (*Abduction is not out of base desire; with noble desire!*)

"Whatever society we think about, it is fair to think in terms of the principles of that society", said Muddukrishna. (*However, he has not observed this principle at any place in his play.*)

When he speaks of the 'custom' of Rakshasa race, first, both the persons must belong to that race. In addition, that woman should be willing to that act. If her elders did not like, then it might not be wrong to defy those elders and take her away. Here, however, Sita was not a woman of Rakshasa race. She was not willing. Even in the case of a Rakshasa woman, it had been considered wrong, even by the ancestors, to carry away an unwilling woman. It is very strange that an act — which the ancestors found to be wrong and faulty — appeared very much justified to these modernists. We have to arrive at the conclusion that these people simply utter words like, 'fairness, justice' but have not understood their meanings.

Muddukrishna says that Ravana loved Sita very much and treated her with great admiration without harassing or insulting her. As evidence to his comments, he showed all the scenes in which Ravana did not touch Sita. (*Abducting and admiring!*)

"Aryans occupied the regions around Sindhu and Ganga rivers. It was Rama who crossed Dandakaranya and first conquered the races of southern countries. The Aryan world must have praised Rama a lot since he defeated

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★ Muddukrishna. 1930. *Asokam*. Vijayawada: Visalandhra Publishing House, 1969.

and subdued the tribe of Ravana who were civilized and war experts that resisted Aryan aggression, who did not yield so easily like other tribes and fought fiercely." (p. 68)

From this, it is evident that Muddukrishna is telling us that Rama and Ravana were enemies. (*But see later how his play evolves!*)

"....How is it right to kill Sambuka?..... How will Rama be eligible for respect as an ideal man without any spot?.... He resorted to baseness and abandoned her...that great wife.... fully pregnant woman in the forests....Rama is extremely thirsty for fame...." (p. 73-4)

From this it is clear that Muddukrishna considered Rama as a merciless and base person, isn't it?

"By considering this kind of wicked man as an ideal husband, if we still do not understand how much we are degrading women unjustly and how we are making men arrogant......" (p. 77)

All this means that in the story of *Ramayana*, Sita was a victim to the domination of her husband and she did not have social and psychological conditions where by she could defy her husband, doesn't it? See later how the character of Sita — which ought to remain in this kind of social limitations — will be in his play!

The play '*Asokam*' will be as follows

In Mithila, Sita sits in a garden. The following day her *swayamvaram* (self-selection of a bridegroom). Her companion-maid comes and informs about Ravana's arrival. Sita asks her to get him in. As soon as Ravana comes, the maid leaves.

"That seat....", says Sita, inviting Ravana.

"All right!" — Ravana.

"Such a long troublesome journey from Lanka...."

"No. No trouble for a resolute person"

"Courageous people...."

"I have come not only to seek your permission as per the custom but I have come mainly to tell you with an open heart"

"What?"

"Sita! Forgive me, I am telling you without concealing any thing. I searched the entire world to find out which goddess will give peace to my heart burning with love. Last year, I travelled to Kashmir in the airplane via Mithila. Fortunately, you were watching the city from the top of your mansion. I too was looking with a *duura suuchana* (distance viewer) with an intention to see the beauty of the city. (*Ravana saw Sita with binoculars! It is the opinion of the writer that Ravana had all such instruments and machines*). To my fortune, you had appeared. I saw you imprinting on my eyes. (*Did he ave printing machine also?*) Meanwhile, you looked upward....I diverted my view as it was queen's mansion......" Since then Ravana had love for Sita! He searched the entire world to find out a goddess who would give him peace to his heart burning with love! Sita appeared to him. (*Muddukrishna also has given the evidence that Sita's eyes make men intoxicated, hasn't he? Well, will Sita with such eyes not make men intoxicated? May be al men love her only!*)

Ravana narrated everything as how he was suffering romantically since he had seen Sita from the airplane. Later, he said further like this: ".....I am a worshipper of Maheswara. My heart is uncomfortable at the thought of bending the bow of Siva. I know every body that comes for swayamvaram.... Rama is capable.... He does not have hesitation to bend Siva's bow... While aiming Siva's bow my heart may tremble out of devotion for Siva and I may lose the contest. Then it will be Rama who will win. You will become the wife of Rama. But Rama is not a husband. His goal is to become an ideal king o the people. But his ideal will not provide happiness to him, or to you.... If your hear desires for a lover who can put his entire life a your feet and worship you, think that this Ravana is available to you."

Ravana has now come only for the swayamvaram of Sita. (*It is a matter of airplane No difficulty!*) As he is a devotee of Siva, he thinks he may not be able to break it. Rama alone will win. If Sita wants a good lover in future, he would be available to her. He is asking her to remember this point.

Sita's reply: "Ravana! There is no point of ny own decision involved here! I am leaving every thing to fate and Janaka, my father…."

Then Ravana takes leave from her. It is Ravana's opinion that Rama would be a good king. Ravana is not satisfied with any woman. He has complete love for Sita. — These are the writer's views!

Later Rama comes to Sita. "I didn't expect hat Mithila is such a beautiful place!" says he.

"People say that here we do not have great nansions and wonders that you have in Ayodhya?" says Sita.

After this kind of conversion for a while, Rama begins to talk about himself. He says his goal is to be a good king. In the process of ındertaking such a task, his wife would be roublesome. He would attend *swayamvaram* f Sita were willing to become his wife!

"Sita!.... My wife should be my companion n all matters… The life I chose will put me in nany hardships…. When it is necessary, for he sake of my ideal, I will not only abandon all ny pleasures but also the kingdom and even wife", says Rama.

Sita says, "These ideals are great. These do not frighten me. Moreover, they attract me. I eft my future to my father… I told the same hing when Ravana asked me…."

She tells Rama her conversation with Ravana. Rama also tells Sita, 'I too met Ravana' ınd praises him. "He told me that he wandered he entire world for the goddess of love and he ound that holy figure in you and hence trying or that Siva's arrow. He is *total lover*. Except njoying life with love and pleasure, he does ot know any other thing."

"Yes. I heard him saying very clearly without concealing anything."

"But, Sita, my goal is totally different…."

This is how Sita and Rama talked to each ther.

Rama knew before marriage that Ravana oved Sita. He received this fact casually. Sita oo talked to Rama about Ravana 'freely'.

Muddukrishna has said in his essay, Whatever society we talk about, it is fair to hink in terms of principles of that society." Hasn't he said so?

In a society that appears in *Ramayana*, would Ravana and Rama come and talk to Sita who was in the harem? Would Rama and Sita talk about Ravana's love for Sita? To which period of time do these things belong?

Later, in Panchavati, Sita and Rama sit on a stone in front of their cottage.

Rama: "Sita! How much this Rama is troubling you!"

"Don't say like that. Are they troubles when my Rama is beside me?"

"You are a delicate woman."

"What about you? You too…."

"This body is accustomed to many kinds of labour while learning archery, horse riding and wrestling"

"Don't I know archery and horse riding? I too laboured and learnt those skills" — Sita.

"Sita! I do not mean that you are less in courage, patience and strength! I am talking so because you are a woman. But, life in harems…. happily…."

(*Rama is talking to Sita about 'equality'! 'I am not talking like this because you are a woman! Women are not inferior to men' says Rama! However, those women reside in harems only!*)

"Rama! I did not come here as your slave since you asked me…. there is no Sita without life with Rama…." (*Sita is telling that she is not a slave!*)

"Sita! Thank you. My life is fulfilled. That day, I asked you to remain in Mithila until exile in forest is over.

As I felt that why you should face hardships due to me…."

All are this kind of words! It was writer's intention to tell that Sita observed her devotion to the husband out of her ideas of freedom, that there existed only love between wife and husband and not devotion to the husband and that her husband perceived her love as a great value."

Individuality, ideas of freedom, likes and dislikes for women! Again harems!

Rama: "Sita! To lead your life happily and like nectar, Ravana alone is a suitable man for you. It is only Ravana who will give up every thing for you and has the ability to submerge you in constant joy….."

Sita closes Rama's mouth. (*"Alas! I am not able to please you! If it were Ravana, he would have pleased you", Rama thinks! Mr. Muddukrishna! In which society you made this Rama?*)

Meanwhile, Ravana arrives there. Rama and Sita invite him with smiles. Sita talks very freely with Ravana. Ravana feels sad for he could not become a devotee of Rama like Sabari.

"What a funny idea?" says Sita.

"Why such a situation for the supreme head of Lanka?" says Rama with a smile. (*As if, it was an inferior situation for Sabari to have reverence for Rama! Of course, even this is true!*)

The conversation goes on with Sita's jokes and humour.

Ravana asks Sita and Rama to come to his kingdom. "I have been under tension since you left Ayodhya…. I find it difficult to see you suffering in these forests…You know my affection, friendship and love towards you and Sita…. You come to the city of Lanka and spend the rest of your time. I will keep kingdom of Lanka and every thing under your control. I knew that some ill reputation would be caused if I stay there. Therefore, I will go towards southeast and establish a new kingdom there. (*So, this noble man is going to invade some other country!*) Rama! These troubles in these forests are hard for Sita."

Rama: "Ravana! We are thankful to you for your affection… But it is not possible."

Sita: "Don't think we have not understood your heart and its purity…."

Ravana: "Rama! Some depth in you from which one cannot come out is attracting me."

Sita: "You are able to understand Rama"

Ravana: "Lanka will be under your control whenever you want. I will follow as per your wish. I am ready to do whatever you want for the sake of Sita."

Sita: "Ravana! You and Rama are thinking about me only. But some power in you is showing patience as if I step backwards."

Rama: "Yes. There is a great generosity in him…. Yesterday, your sister (Surpanakha) came here and insisted that she would help us in overcoming your problems…." In this manner, there is a boundless friendship between Rama and Ravana. Well, then, what happened to the *fate* of racial hostilities? The same writer said in his essay that Rama invaded Ravana and Ravana resisted Rama. While racial hostilities remain so, will that history disappear if he changed the characters? Can a writer change history as he wishes?

Is it not a matter of insult to Ravana to tell that he was highly impressed by Rama?

What an open dialogue concerning Sita's love for Ravana! "If I stay in Lanka, you will get disrepute. So, I will give Lanka to you and go far away", says Ravana. Why does disrepute come? That society is in a situation where it finds fault with a man's love with other man's wife. In such society, from where did these 'liberals' come?

(*Husband praising wife's lover, wife praising husband's love — to which society this atmosphere belong? It belongs to bourgeois society, which encourages relations of debauchery. The writer brought this debauchic, civilized, hypocritical liberalism and inserted it into the characters of 'Ramayana'! All these oddities are the result of these ideas.*)

While leaving Panchavati, Ravana meets Surpanakha on his way. Surpanakha says, "I will see that you get Sita." Ravana disappointingly says, "I have grasped Sita's heart clearly. She loves *each atom of Rama*."

"You are so innocent in the matters of women, as much as you are strong in the battle. That is why until today you have not achieved love to your satisfaction…. I loved Rama…. How pleasant man he is! In the life of love men and women…. especially women have more jealousy!.... for me Rama is gracious…. I will take away Rama and cause jealousy to Sita…. Sita is suffering a lot from Rama. The crazy observance that marriage is a pious relationship is confined to men only. Woman's overflowing love leans wherever it is…." Surpanakha speaks in this manner. (*These words are not Surpanakha's. But of the writer. "Men observe marriage as a pious relationship! Women go wherever they find love!' What are these formulations?*)

"Sita likes you. Take her to Lanka and try for her love. I will make Rama come under my possession" — This is the essence of Surpanakha's words. (*Because his sister suggested, this noble lover will abduct Sita! Again, as if he is writing the story as per Valmiki!*)

Later in Lanka.

Sita sat on the platform made of emeralds in Asoka vana. (*On emerald platform! In the life of love, gold, diamonds, emeralds, pearls and gems must be there!*)

"Sita!" — Ravana with agitation.

"Come! Come here! Sit.... Why have you been so hasty?.... Turning into a cyclone, why have you brought me?.... Did you think of the ill name you get in future?" says Sita. This means, Ravana brought Sita forcibly or without her knowledge, doesn't it? Shouldn't Sita, who has ideas of freedom, feel insulted? No, there is no such feeling.

"Is it not disrepute to you? Why have you brought me?" asks Sita, as if she does not have any problem! (*The writer said it was a custom to abduct women in Rakshasa race, then why would Ravana get disrepute.*)

In the case of forest life, Sita said, "I have not come as a slave. I came willingly." Sita, who has so much individuality, speaks with delicacy to the man who forcibly abducted her, "Come on, Sit here! Why have you done like this?" What a great individuality has this modern Sita acquired at the hands of Muddukrishna!

In response to Sita's words Ravana says, "I know. They will say that I abducted you with a base desire. (*So, abducting women is not a base desire! It is nobility!*) Have you understood my heart at least now?"

"Why haven't I understood?.... But with so much adventure... wastefully...."

"What should I do Sita? How much I was anxious for the peace of my heart!.... How many beauties have I confiscated? (*Ravana abducted many beautiful women and confiscated their beauty! But, poor fellow, he has not secured peace of his heart. What could he do? He ought to abduct any one for the sake of peace, oughtn't he? Isn't it Mr. Muddukrishna?*) Sita! Am I agonizing you? Am I doing harm to you?"

"No. Why have you been hasty? (*Nay! What harm is there for me? Why have you abducted me?*)

"To get you I feel like to gamble my life, my fame, my kingdom and every thing...."

"Why are you turning so pathetic?.... Have you thought how sad Rama will feel? Can you accept the universal love in the heart of a woman?"

"What Sita?"

"May be self-less love is unimaginable for men! Attitude of woman is different. Woman knows more the kind of love that is given away..... Man cannot withstand this universal demonstration of love in woman. In this vast area, that *slight palm-length selfishness* will be condemnable." (*Except measuring selfishness with the length of a palm, have you understood what Sita is talking?*)

Ravana faints at the feet of Sita. Sita has sympathy for Ravana! She, however, delivered some confusing dialogues and made him faint.

"This is a great strength in the heart of woman to bear difficulties" — Rama.

"Sita! What is this fire of secrets of creation! What a light in your eyes!" — Ravana.

"Woman knows the love that is given away" — Sita.

As if, a woman is some body who is trans-world phenomenon!

"Woman bears hardships." (*Because she has no other way. Not because hardships are comfortable!*)

"Eyes of the woman tell great secrets to man" (*Eyes of other man's woman!*)

"Woman knows love which is given away" (*Because she has no right to take!*)

All these theories arose from the degraded position of woman. These modernists glorify this low position of woman, thinking that they are glorifying woman.

....

The last scene! In which Sita meets Rama after the battle in Lanka!

Arrangements are made for fire test.

The flames of fire burning with their *extended lips*.

Rama is in an agitated mood. Sita appeared as if she was born to purify earth.

Rama: "Sita! As I considered it a fate to kill Ravana.... But you know the heart of your Rama is pure.... There is no place for hatred and doubt...." This means Rama was asking, "I killed Ravana due to fate. I hope you will not misunderstand me."

Notice how the two are talking. After a while, fire test will be held!

Sita: "Have you understood Ravana?"

"Understood completely... In his last stage he recited your name only"

"Did he talk with consciousness?"

"He said his goal was to perish for your sake... He revealed his heart while dying and melting my heart.... he pitifully begged me, 'Make Sita happy at least now onwards. People will blame, do not heed. I melted internally with grief and tears. What an ideal lover he was! Sita! If Ravana was alive.... he would have felt very sad for this fire test?"

Sita lowers her head, says, "Yes, he would have felt very sad" and enters the fire!

— This is the play of Muddukrishna's *Asokam*!

In this last scene, Rama and Sita talked with fondness about Ravana. Again, fire test! 'For the sake of fate! For the sake of people!' they say.

In this play, there is no hostility between Rama and Ravana. Moreover, they have extraordinary friendship! Ravana admires Rama's broadmindedness. Rama feels excited over Ravana's love for his wife (Sita).

Rama is indescribably noble. He talks with love even about the lover of his wife. Muddukrishna felt very sad that Sita in *Ramayana* faced many insults due to Rama. However, in this play, this couple are like friends who do not belong to any particular world! From which society all these characters had emerged? In which stage of human society this kind of people existed. If this kind of persons are there, is it degradation or ideal?

We have a society, which Valmiki depicted. We have characters, which Valmiki portrayed. However, this writer created these characters in order to reject Valmiki and create afresh!

"In this play, I attempted to construct Sita and Rama nobler than in *Ramayana*, more serene, liberal, as those who reached a higher stage in human evolution and as pious hearted persons who grasped the full lustre of truth", said Muddukrishna.

Characters in *Ramayana* will be the characters belonging to *Ramayana* period but how can they belong to a period higher than the past? If some one changes the story of *Ramayana* differently from what it originally was, how can it be the story of *Ramayana*? Harems, chastity, forest life, fire ordeal — every thing remained the same. However, the writer showed friendship between two men who loved the same woman. Battles and killings remained as before. Again affection between the two who fight that battle.

"Sita of this play became a woman of individuality who at every step decided her principles and morality for herself and who sustained her character" said the writer. Where has Sita made her own decisions? She left the issue of her marriage to the fate, to the father and that heavy bow, didn't she? The nobility that she attained is that she did not get angry with a fellow who abducted her forcefully. Again tradition of yielding to the fire test!

"I defy the morals of *Ramayana*. They are not just. I do not accept them", the writer attacks the characters in *Ramayana*. However, in actuality, he glorifies Rama more than the original. Thinking that he changed Sita radically, he made her a slave of fire ordeal! This is what *Asokam* of Muddukrishna is! A great confusion!

★

[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

7. Chalam's 'Sita's entry into Fire'★

This is a short play. There are only two characters: Sita and Rama.

Battle in Lanka is over. Sita comes to Rama. She speaks with warmth and under the impact of long separation, "Rama! Incarnation of good fortune! After how long I could see your divine beautiful form! With the strength and pride of your shoulders you have killed this cruel Rakshasa..... I have been anxiously looking forward for this pious day... Now, my whole life will be free from old age and death due to the nectar of your love... This great battle proved that my heart was dedicated to you, that either lure or fear of death cannot change my heart and that your deep love will not be restricted by the limits of time..." Thus Sita keeps on talking emotionally.

Rama interrupts her in the middle of her talk. "Stop, Sita! Listen to my words carefully! By fate, you are a woman. You have been stolen by enemies. Others touched you. You are polluted.... You cannot become my crown queen", Rama said.

"Talk explicitly. What do you mean by *others touched you*", asked Sita.

"Ravana loved you"

"Is it my fault?"

"He abducted you"

"Is it my fault?"

"You lived in the garden of his harem"

"Is it my fault?"

In this play, Sita, like Sita in *Ramayana*, is also an *Ayoonija* (one who is not born to human vagina). She is a pious woman who was not born to human female. Ravana who appears in Sita's words is also a ten-headed Rakshasa! These characters are the same characters as we find in mythological story. In this play also, we find gods and Rakshasas. However, this Sita speaks with the consciousness of women of modern times! Not completely like that. Some times, like Sita of old times. Sometimes like a new Sita.

After Rama said to her, "As another man had stolen you, you cannot be my queen", Sita replies as follows:

"At the time of marriage, you accepted me as your wife, declaring that you would share pleasures and sorrows with me, that you would never make me sad, that you would bear my burden and that you would protect me. It is your responsibility to rescue me from the enemies. If some man loves me or abducts me, will our relationship break? Am I a food to be thrown to crows, with the suspicion that another man defiled me? I am the dear daughter of Janaka. I am an *Ayonija*!...Is it because that I am woman and it is because I am a helpless dog that you are able to violate so easily with one word, all promises, love, Dharma and marriage culture?....If your life is disturbed like mine, will you so easily ask me to go away?....When you reject and kick me out, if I follow you like a dog, fall at your feet and cry, repent over the mistakes which I have not done and if I bow my head to all kinds of insults, people will praise me as a devoted wife for ages! If I have some self-respect and revolt against your baseness, abuse your harshness and find my own way of life, I will become an unchaste woman.... I am a machine to bear children and hand them over to you. Now you feel it is spoiled. So, you will get another machine. Woman has no life. No heart. No dharma....." This is how Sita's defiance proceeds.

This Sita is speaking, crossing the limits of

★ Chalam. 1930s. *Sita Agni Preveesam.* In 'Chalam Naatakaalu-1'. Vijayawada: Desi Kavita Mandali, 1962. ●

the period of *Ramayana*. "Am I a food to get defiled? Is a woman equal to a dog to chase her with such baseness? Does woman have no right as man? Is woman a child-bearing machine?" — These kinds of questions relate to modern society. Sita of *Ramayana* period might not have imagined these questions even in her dream. If Sita of that time hears these questions, she would consider them defiance of Dharma. 'Equal rights to woman with man? If not to bear children, why was woman born?' — This is how she will be surprised. Sita too would believe that a woman is impure if she is another man molests her. Can we show Sita — who considers serving the feet and living lie a chaste woman is a great dharma — as some one who defied her husband?

In this play also, Sita tells Rama that it is his responsibility to bear her burden and to protect her. This Sita (Chalam's Sita) also depends on the husband for every thing. "You accepted me as the wife promising to bear my burden and to protect me. It is your responsibility to rescue me from the enemies", she says. This means, she is in such a situation where she acknowledges, "You have to rescue me. You have to take care of me. I am not capable to take care of my self. I will live in your shade only." Then where is the question of arguing, "Do I not have freedom? Do I not have rights as you have?"

Sita cannot protect her self from enemies and wild animals. Will she, then, have the freedom to move in the forests as she wishes? She has to move as per the commands of those who protect her. If that protector asks her, "Now, do not go out. I will not accompany you now", then she has to stop going out. If he says, "All right. Go beyond that door and move around that *Ponna* tree", she has to oblige. Why? It is because she cannot protect herself if any danger befalls her. Will it be possible for her to say, "Do I not have freedom? It is my will. I will go right now. Come along! Protect me! Take my responsibility! Dependence on others and freedom do not go together. If she would like to move freely in the forest, she has to protect herself.

This applies to any situation.

Valmiki's Sita is not in a situation where she can live freely. She does not have the consciousness of talking about freedom either. The two go together.

Chalam's Sita too is not in a situation whereby she can live independently. As she cannot claim that her situation has changed, she is depicting herself as 'Ayonija'. That is, like old Sita. She is referring to her husband as her protector. However, the same Sita is talking about freedom and rights. She is asking, "Am I a child-bearing machine? Is woman's dharma and men's dharma not the same?"

It is one thing if the present day writer realises the fact that injustice had been done to Sita in *Ramayana* and it is another thing if Sita herself realizes.

It is one thing if the writer argues on behalf of Sita and it is another thing if Sita argues for herself.

On hearing Rama's words, Sita of *Ramayana* also would realise that injustice has been done to her and feels sad. However, not with the present-day consciousness. Her thoughts and her anger do not go beyond her social situation.

In another context, Sita says to Rama, "You have Dharmas and duties towards your mother, father, brothers, people, animals and stones. But not towards your wife."

Why not? Rama has clear-cut dharmas and morals toward his wife as well. Just as there is a clear-cut dharma, that 'one has to respect his father', there are so clear-cut dharmas such as, 'One should not respect his wife. Should not recognize her as an individual. One has to use the wife for service and sex only. One has to punish her severely and abandon her if the wife looks at another man or another man looks at the wife.' Rama is following these dharmas towards his wife. Then, where is the question of not having dharmas and duties toward the wife.

Then, Chalam's Sita got very angry with her husband. That anger turned into love for Ravana. At the beginning of the play, she says, "You have rescued me from that wicked Rakshasa." Now, the same Rakshasa who appeared cruel has become a noble man in the view of Sita. She says to Rama about Ravana as follows: "Ravana loved me. Even your sharp arrows too could not destroy Ravana's bondage of love… As soon as you got a fictitious doubt that some one may doubt about me in some corner, your love for me is broken. Though all people, brothers, wives, sages and all gods were telling him it was unjust and even while kingdom, wealth, fond sons and brothers were perishing and even when his ten heads were cut and rolling on the ground, his love was not shaken! He loved! You do not understand that love. Hence, you called it animality and Rakshasa-hood and destroyed him from the roots… Did he molest me? He is not such base man. He wished my love. However, he did not treat me as a machine that produces off spring… He desired my company and sacrificed every thing as he thought his life without me was a waste. The sin of not loving such a courageous man and my harshness towards him turned like this." Sita repented for not accepting Ravana.

She further says to Rama, "Suppose that Rakshasa molested me. You ought to sooth my delicate heart, which is insulted by the molestation of that Rakshasa. Is this mercy that you show? You are a machine who carries on Dharma. I am a childbearing machine. Not that you abandon me; I, my self, am abandoning you — as a husband — who is a heartless machine, cheat, a base fellow. I will purify my heart — which became impure due to your base name — with the blood of the valorous lover and this holy fire…" Saying so Sita jumps into the pyre of Ravana.

It is a matter of self-respect for Sita to realise the baseness in her husband and rejecting him. However, what sort of self-respect it is to treat Ravana as a noble lover? Whatever defects Sita pointed out in Rama, all of them are present in Ravana also. Moreover, Ravana has an additional baseness of abducting women and molesting them. How can such Ravana be eligible for the love of any woman? 'Ravana has not treated me like a child-bearing machine', says Sita. Why does he treat her so? She has not yet become his wife. He treats his wives as childbearing machines only. Just as Rama treated Sita, Ravana treats Mandodari in the same way.

Reference to 'child-bearing machine' is irrelevant here. Has Ravana not treated Sita as sex-satisfying machine? Did he not forcefully hold Sita's lock of hair, drag her, and abduct her? If he had vengeance on Rama, why should he use Sita instead of taking revenge against Rama himself? How did Sita trouble him? This means, Ravana did not treat Sita as an independent individual. He considered her as a person under Rama's control. He abducted Sita only to trouble Rama. Not out of love for Sita. Men who do debauchery with other women do not give up an opportunity if they find a woman. In the same way, Ravana also ran after Sita. It is not 'love'.

In Valmiki *Ramayana*, speaking to Sita, Ravana once says, "I am praying to you so much out of my pain for sexual desire. Otherwise, will a (great) man like Ravana salute a woman?" Just as Rama has the view that women are inferior beings, Ravana too has it.

When Ravana dies, Mandodari says, crying, "Why don't you get angry with us for we came out of the harems?" Ravana kept his wives in the same situation in which Rama kept his wife. If any hostile king abducted Mandodari and Ravana brought her back after some time, Ravana too would have demanded Mandodari to undergo fire test as Rama demanded Sita.

The reason for Ravana molesting Sita is his curse, as per the story. Otherwise, it was not his nobility. How can a man be noble who always abducts woman and molest them? How can Ravana be a noble husband? How can he become a man who respects woman? A man who is not a noble husband and who has no respect for women, how can he be a noble lover?

Chalam's Sita refused Rama but had chosen a worse fellow. How does it bring respect to her?

Even after jumping into the pyre of Ravana, Sita says to Rama, "Though my heart is pious, you have abandoned me doubting that my body has become impure. However, this Rakshasa desired only my heart though he knew that my body became impure due to you. Will the sensible people be not born in this world who can decide whose is noble love?"

There is some meaning if Rama thought that Sita's body became impure because of Ravana since Ravana is an outside man. There is no meaning in Ravana thinking that Sita's body became impure due to Rama since Rama is not an outside man for Sita. Neither that man nor that woman think that woman's body become impure due to her husband. Even an outside man who desires that woman would not think so.

"That valorous lover"

"He desired my heart"

"He loved me" — Just because Sita dropped such words as these with reference to Ravana, he can not become a valorous lover. Nor it is love.

There is no scope for the kind of 'noble' love, which Chalam talks in the context of *Ramayana* where women are used to settle the scores between one man and another.

Writers who are deeply concerned with opening the eyes of women who live like slaves create women characters with new consciousness. However, this new consciousness should not be beyond the period to which the story belongs and to the nature of the characters. If they want to praise or criticise a given work or its characters, they should not cross the limits of that work.

If somebody makes Sita (who claims that she was not born out of human vagina) ask Rama, "Are women child-bearing machines?", will this be a new consciousness? No. It becomes incoherence between the situation of the character and its consciousness. It is like inserting the new time (present) into an old time (past). Therefore, it is not possible to express modern ideas of women through Sita of *Ramayana*.

Sita of *Ramayana* does not possess the capacity and the situation whereby she rejects Rama with self-respect.

If Sita rejected Rama in Lanka itself, then who was the Sita who went to Ayodhya along with Rama? Who was that Sita who gave birth to Lava and Kusa? How should the remaining story proceed?

The story which Chalam has taken for his play is *Ramayana*, isn't it? The play proceeded as per *Ramayana* until Rama rejected Sita. If Sita died in Lanka itself what would happen to the remaining story? Does it mean that the remaining story no more exists?

Grieving for the insult from her husband, abusing him to some extent and finally bearing the insult, Sita is obliged to go to Ayodhya along with the husband. Other writers have no right to change that story. The writers have to show her agony and grief within the limits of that character. Writers can express any idea in their own words in the form of criticism or comments. They should not exhibit their new ideas through those characters.

Chalam has lot of affection for Sita. But, how insulting it is to describe as if Sita chose Ravana!

Even if Sita rejected Rama, she need not choose Ravana.

Rejecting one arrogant man is not for the sake of selecting another arrogant man. ★

[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

8. Periyar E.V.Ramaswamy's 'Ramayana: A True Reading'★

[**Mr.** Periyar (hereafter Periyar) is a Tamil writer. 'Periyar' means 'elderly', 'elderly man'. This is a kind of title and form of address in Tamil. I will refer to him not with his name Ramaswamy but as Periyar. Because, in this part on 'Some Critics of *Ramayana*', there is another Ramaswamy. Therefore, I mention him as Periyar only. Periyar wrote this essay originally in Tamil and it has an English translation. Here I take that English translation. As we need to know Periyar's views on *Ramayana*, I am taking this essay in this part.]

In this essay, Periyar first presented his views on *Ramayana* in brief and subsequently criticised each character.

Periyar's views on *Ramayana* are the following: *Ramayana* did not happen. It is a fiction. Rama is neither a Tamilian nor does he belong to Tamilnadu. He was a northerner. Ravana was the king of Lanka. Lanka means southern Tamilnadu.

There is "not an iota of Tamil culture in Rama or Sita." They are devoid of Tamil characteristics. Nor there is any thing to be called divine in Rama or Sita. (Preface).

Ramayana and *Bhaarata* are mythological stories, which Aryans created. Aryans created these stories in order to proclaim that they were superior beings by birth. Glorifying Aryans and making Dravidians traitors is the objective of *Ramayana*. All the incidents in it are totally uncivilized and primitive. There is nothing, not even a single aspect, which is useful, ideal, logical or praiseworthy in this. For Tamils it is not at all useful. Brahmin domination, degrading women and insulting Tamils are its features.

They wrote all these stories originally in Sanskrit. The use of Sanskrit in this text helped Aryans. They give strange interpretations and commentaries with their own imagination while propagating among people depending upon the intelligence and innocence of masses. They tell "white lies" that pious men — who descended from heaven to uplift the world — narrated these stories, that these are Holy Scriptures, that these are moral teachings, that these are corner stones of the religion and so on. They attach importance, which these stories do not deserve.

"The Aryans, when they invaded the ancient land of the Dravidians, maltreated and dishonoured the latter and had written a false and coloured history wholly fallacious. It is this they call *Ramayana*...." (p. 3).

They disseminated the conception that *Ramayana* is a holy text among not only uneducated people but also among the educated, right from their young age through their education. Even the educated people "believe in the other worlds of the Aryans and enslaved by this belief." (p. 2)

Praising *Ramayana* by Tamils means that they are insulting themselves. It is to damage their self-respect. If Tamils wish to protect their self-respect and liberate themselves from the slavery to Aryan domination, "the vicious motives and nature of the legends and Puranas should be disclosed." (p. 2)

Aryan gods and their importance that

★ Ramaswamy, Periyar E.V. 1935/1959. The *Ramayana*: A True Reading. (Translation from Tamil). Trichi: Periyar Self-Respect Propaganda Institution Publications, 1972. (Second Edition) ●

humiliates Tamils "should be razed out." Every Tamilian in whose veins pure blood is flowing must consider this as his responsibility. (*Periyar has not explained what 'pure Dravidian blood' is. Can we talk about blood in terms of Aryan blood and Dravidian blood? Instead, self-respect of Dravidians is a better word. Publishers of this book gave a note in this book stating that on 1-8-1956, Tamilians had openly burnt thousands of pictures of Rama.*)

All educated Tamils, whenever they talk of *Ramayana*, keep 'Kamba' *Ramayana* in their view. (*Kamba Ramayana* is the translation of Valmiki *Ramayana* by a Tamil poet Kamban). Pundits, for the sake of their livelihood and for demonstrating their scholarship, teach and give lectures on Kamba *Ramayana*. The "villainous Kamban" concealed the 'trend and truth' of Valmiki *Ramayana* and prepared the story in a very delicate manner. Tamils must realise this fact, read correct translation of Valmiki's Sanskrit *Ramayana* and understand the actual things. (Periyar mentioned some Tamil translation by Ananda Chariar; other subsequent translations by Natesh Sastriar, C.R. Srinivasa Ayyangar, Narasimha Chariar.)

In this manner, Periyar presented his views on Ramayana briefly. Except 'pure Dravidian blood' rest of the arguments are correct. One can agree fully.

Then, Periyar began to talk about the characters in *Ramayana*. Except Vali and Ravana, he opposed all other characters.

There is nothing to oppose his views regarding the partial attitude and chauvinism of Aryans. They are wholly correct. However, Periyar committed the same mistake, which Aryans did. He eulogized Ravana as much as devotees of Aryans did in the case of Rama. Even in the most unjustifiable contexts also, he tried to project Ravana as superior.

While observing that Valmiki degraded women, this man also degraded. He showed anger towards Sita as much as he showed towards Rama. The reason is that Sita is an Aryan woman. He has not realised that Aryan woman who is with the Aryan man is his slave and one should not treat an Aryan woman as he treats an Aryan man.

Arguing that Valmiki wrote illogical things, Periyar too did the same thing in his criticism.

Let us now see Periyar's critical observations one after the other.

★ ★

Though Dasaratha was alive for 60 thousand years, he had surrendered to his beastly lust, he could not treat his first two wives with enough love. (p. 12)

"Rama's father even after 60 thousand years of age was lewd profligate." (p. 56)

This is Periyar's criticism of Dasaratha on one occasion.

"Though Dasaratha lived for 60 thousand years….." What does this mean? Does this mean that he believes that humans live for 60 thousand years? Should we take such things verbatim from mythological stories? He should have said, "Though Dasaratha became very old….."

He says Dasaratha did not treat his first two wives with sufficient love. However, Dasaratha had not only three wives. There is evidence in Valmiki that he had more wives. If we understand those women in the plural form of the word, 'wives', where is the scope of love? If he really had love for the first wife, there would not be second wife at all. The fact that he had more than one wife means that he had no love for any one of them. We should not arrive at the conclusion that Dasaratha had any love for Kaika. It is not love. He had promised her long back and later tried to go back on it. However, as this is a mythological story, there is a hurdle called 'vow of truth'. Because of this, he had to do as per his promise to Kaika. Other than this, it was neither love for Kaika nor surrendering to lust. In this regard, just as every body blamed Dasaratha that he 'yielded to lust' and he 'surrendered to a woman', Periyar too blamed him.

When Kaika demands to send Rama to

exile, Dasaratha tells Kaika that he would touch her feet if she does not insist on the exile. Referring to this context, Periyar ridicules Dasaratha. "He forgot who he was and what his status was and fell at her feet." (p. 13)

In Periyar's view, if a husband says he would touch his wife's feet to beg her pardon is mean behaviour. Dasaratha had forgotten who he was and what his status was! If Dasaratha were a king, would his wife not become a queen? Should a king exhibit his status of a king in front of his wife also? Is it in respect of falling on the feet of his wife that one should criticise Dasaratha? Valmiki said, "Even such a great king cried like an orphan in front of Kaika who violated the behavioural norms of a woman." This critic too has done the same thing. What is the difference between Valmiki and this gentleman?

"The advice given by Vasishta was that according to the tradition in the lineage of Elakkuvagu the eldest son of the family should get the kingdom. But, Dasaratha spurned it aside overcome by lust for Kaikeyi." (p. 13) (*This is the view of Mr. Srinivasayyangar, a Tamil translator of Valmiki Ramayana. Periyar agreed with him and gave these words.*)

What does this mean? This means Periyar accepts the statement that Dasaratha did a wrong thing in not giving kingdom to Rama and Rama had the legitimate right over the kingdom. But, the entire criticism of Periyar is that Rama was prepared for coronation for which he was not entitled!

"Rama knew very clearly that Kaika had the right over the kingdom. In order to seize it, Rama exhibited so much humility towards his father and Kaika" (p. 15), says Periyar. However, it is surprising that he supports the contrary opinion of Ayyangar.

Some observations of Periyar on Rama:

"....Valmiki, the author, depicts that Rama was wicked in thought and deed, was an embodiment of lies, treachery, artificiality and cunningness, hard-heartedness, greediness, murder, drunkenness, flesh eating, arrowing at the innocent covertly, wicked associations, unmanliness and what not." (p. 5)

It was not Valmiki's intention to depict Rama as a wicked man. Every now and then, the poet says that Rama is a noble man. All the deeds of Rama are agreeable to the poet. It is wrong to say that the poet depicted Rama as a wicked man. Since the nature of Rama's deeds is wicked, however much the poet tried to depict Rama as a noble man, he emerged as a wicked character. While counting the vile acts of Rama, Periyar included 'drunkenness' and 'flesh eating'. A person will not be a vile man because of these features. They are habits connected with food and health. It seems Periyar has forgotten that Ravana also had these two features.

Periyar described Rama as 'a snake under the grass' (p. 15). (*This is a good simile. This suits the character of Rama.*)

"The cunning Brahmins, having made such a dishonest, impotent, unworthy and characterless fellow as god, ask us to adore him and worship him." (p. 50)

"....Valmiki himself has stated that Rama is neither a god nor has any divine power in him." (p. 57)

Did Valmiki say that Rama was not a god? It is very surprising that Periyar talked so keeping entire Valmiki *Ramayana* in view!

The very birth of Rama was that he had the elements of Vishnu, his constant performance of super human deeds, his relieving of curses of people, his conversation with many gods — Are all these acts not divine powers? The poet declared Rama is the incarnation of Vishnu throughout the story. Does it mean that Valmiki stated that Rama was not a god?

Referring to Kausalya and Sumitra, Periyar comments: "They do not at all care their husband. They do not pay any attention on the husband. They remain sleeping happily even when their husband died. When their maid servants came in the early morning and wailing, these women woke up leisurely." (p. 56)

If we go by what the poet described in that episode, Kausalya and Sumitra cried and cried for their sons and finally slept. Is it wrong if wife feels like sleeping even when the husband is beside her? The moaning and wailing of that old man are a daily routine, aren't they? How do they know that he puts an end to all those moanings that might? It was Periyar's intention to say, "See the Aryan women! How careless they are towards their husband!" Periyar himself said that Dasaratha was a wicked and lustful man and he did not have love for these two wives.

So according to Periyar these wives should not ignore such a wicked husband but give up sleeping and eating and serve him day and night. He is finding fault with them because they did not serve him so!

What love did these wives receive from that husband so that they could pay more attention towards the husband? Mr. Periyar! Even Dravidian women cannot show greater love than this towards a husband like Dasaratha.

Periyar, who criticised Rama very harshly and at many places rightly, could not find even a single fault in Ravana.

Periyar claims that Valmiki himself praised Ravana several times that he had ten good qualities. This means, Periyar received with joy the good qualities of Ravana, which Valmiki gave. Those good qualities are: A great warrior. A great pundit (scholar). Handsome man. A king who is generous to his people and friends. Rich in penance and obtained many boons by doing fierce penances.

Let us examine the greatness of these features.

A great warrior: What does a warrior do? He fights battles with people weaker than him and snatches their kingdoms and wealth. These are the deeds, which all the warriors in this story did. His valour is useful to his selfishness and pleasures. Rama is also a great warrior. What did he do with that valour? He used it to kill all the enemies beginning from Tataki, Viradha, Khara, Kabandha, Vali and Ravana. Ravana too did the same thing. In the past he waged battles against other races and suppressed them. What is the greatness if some one is a warrior? What is there praise-worthy? Just because he is a warrior, is Rama noble? Even a wicked man can be a warrior. We cannot consider valour as a noble feature.

A Pundit: It is the same case with this quality also. Every person who has opportunities to study well will become a pundit. Education is not something that one person can acquire while another person cannot acquire. A wicked man too can be a pundit. Just because a man is a pundit he will not become a noble person.

Generosity towards people and friends: There is nothing great if some one shows generosity towards one's own relatives and friends. Regarding people, the poet also told us that Rama treated his people generously. Will Periyar agree to it? How can a king be generous to people? He does things that are necessary to sustain his power. He helps the rich, the scholars and the warriors who cooperate with him. He tries to enrich the treasury and expand the army. He under takes some very essential public works for the people and rules the kingdom. Have you not seen how kings rule, in the words of Dasaratha and Rama? What generosity is there? Ravana's generosity is also like that of Rama, isn't it? It is the poet who depicts both of them. If we admit Rama as a noble man, we have to admit Ravana also as a noble man.

Handsomeness: Do we need to talk about this specifically? Is he noble if he is handsome? Rama is also handsome man!

Penances and boons: Will Periyar — who argued that the wonderful deeds of Rama and Hanuman do not stand to logic — agree that Ravana's penance and boons stand to logic? When Valmiki says that 'having performed fierce penance for ten thousand years, Ravana got boons', if Periyar agrees with it thus, "Yes, our Ravana is so great" — will this stand to logic? Is he not thinking that this goes against his own logic? All right, let us consider Ravana's boons. What is great in it?

When god appears before those who do penances and ask them, "What boon do you want?', has any one asked boons for the sake of others instead of for himself? Is there any story that any one asked like this: "All people in the world must be happy. There should be no poverty, no ill health and no premature deaths. Every body should live with comforts and peace."

They always ask for their own sake thus, "I should conquer all my enemies. I should get riches and wealth. I should get kingdoms. I should never die."

It is the same case even with Ravana. He too asked for whatever he wanted. Did he help any one by getting those boons? With those boons, he ruined every body and secured kingdoms.

None of the features which the poet depicted — like Rama is great! Ravana is great — is relevant to judge them as great men.

Describing Ravana, the poet also says, "Cruel, harsh, wicked, frightful and harmful to people, harasses others' women" (*kruuram, karkasam, dushtachariinaam, sarvalooka bhayaavaham, prajanaam ahit ratam paradaaraabhimarsham*). Should Periyar not take these features as well into account. He does not accept the bad qualities which the poet depicted but receives eulogy verbatim!

The poet praises Ravana because Rama is going to conquer such a great man. Because the poet wants to attribute that fame to Rama. If Ravana is an ordinary man, what fame will a man who conquers him get? This is why the poet elaborately describes the riches and wealth of Lanka. Without understanding, devotees of Ravana say, "See how great our Ravana is!"

Observe Periyar's views on Ravana in other aspects.

Recalling what Hanuman said about the romantic nature of Ravana, Periyar goes into ecstasy. "He compared Ravana, whom he found sleeping in the Zanana in the midst of most beautiful ladies in sleep to the full moon shining amidst a galaxy of stars." (p. 56)

Periyar abused Dasaratha for marrying another wife causing agony to the previous wives, didn't he? He ridiculed Rama thus, 'See whom Sri Mahavishnu chose as his father in order to take birth on the earth — an ideal man who had hundreds of wives! What sort of ideal is this?' When the poet, for the sake of his poetry, described Ravana as a moon amidst stars, Periyar also finds Ravana, amidst so many women, as a moon amidst the stars. Does he not remember any of his morals and ideals? Does he not find any thing primitive and uncivilized in this situation? When a man confined so many hundreds of women in his harem under his control! Moreover, Ravana's action is civilized and refined. In a beautiful scene where a man sat amidst hundreds of women, Periyar could see the romantic nature of a Dravidian man but not the slavery of Dravidian women!

All these women came willingly, according to Periyar. The poet said that Ravana did not compel anyone! — Here Periyar is receiving the poet's words obediently.

Well, then, the same poet also said, "....Ravana brought some women with an intention to fight (*yuddha kaameena*) with their relatives. Further, the poet also said that Ravana forcefully boarded many women into the airplane and those women, recalling their parents, husbands and children abused Ravana and cried. According to the story, did Ravana not molest Rambha? Periyar is not willing to see any of these episodes. From the poet, Periyar took whatever is favourable to praise Ravana. He left out whatever is not favourable as if he is unaware of those things.

Let us accept Ravana as a good man in all aspects. However, how can he be a good man in respect of abducting Sita? — As there is a scope for this question, Periyar says that 'Ravana did not take away Sita forcefully but Sita went with Ravana willingly.' He devoted more space to prove this point.

He tried to argue that Sita's character is not good in any aspect, that she went along with an outside man because of her vile nature, that she became pregnant due to Ravana and begot Lava and Kusa.

"In the whole story of *Ramayana* there is scarcely a word of praise about Sita." (p. 23)

Thus, he began to show proofs. These proofs are not one or two. He showed 12 proofs in total. He devoted more pages to this issue. If any one of the proofs stands to the logic, we too can accept thus, "True. Sita went with Ravana willingly".

Now let us see all those proofs in an order.

(1) Periyar started with the statement that the bonafides of Sita's "birth is doubtful and questionable." It is Periyar's opinion that some immoral woman gave birth to Sita and abandoned her. Suppose it was so hundred percent. Even then, is it Sita's fault? While examining Sita's nature do we take her birth into consideration? Does Periyar say that such birth is Sita's fault? He said so!

If it is Sita's fault, it is also Ravana's fault to have born in Dravidian race.

There is no logic in this argument. Aryans were a victorious race. The defeated race ought to be inferior to the victorious race, will Periyar agree to this also?

Periyar cites Sita's words: "After I attained my puberty no prince was willing to marry me on account of the dishonour attached to my birth" (p. 61)

What exactly Sita said to Anasuya was this: "Knowing me as (*Ayonija*) one not born from a womb, king Janaka could not find a suitable husband for me." 'Ayonija' means Sita was not born from the womb of a human female and she is not a human being. As this is mythology, the poet described Sita in the form of that myth. As Sita was not an ordinary human woman, it was Janaka's intention to get a great husband for her. From Sita's words, Periyar inferred the meaning that no one was willing to marry Sita.

Before Rama breaks the bow of Siva, Janaka tells about Sita's birth. None in the story considered it wrong to keep Sita's birth secretly. They considered the fact of 'Ayonija' as a matter of great fame. Moreover, some princes got angry and came to fight with Janaka as he did not give Sita in marriage to them. Janaka narrates this fact also. While the incidents in the story are like this, what is this argument that nobody was willing to marry Sita?

Listen to Periyar's words! Janaka could not find a match for Sita though she reached twenty-five! He was vexed and requested his friend Viswamitra, "Why don't you get a match for the girl." Then, "Viswamitra brought this five-year old Rama and got him married to Sita who was aged not less than 20 years and she did not even murmur for this unequal match." (p.61)

Needless to say that all this is wrong! Periyar, however, thinks that it was Sita's fault not to 'murmur' and he adds this as part of her nature. Are men who marry very young aged women murmuring? If there was a custom of marrying young men, why do women murmur? Moreover, the Aryan women may not murmur so much Mr. Periyar!

(2) Concerning Bharata and Sita, Periyar tells many strong things now. Listen! Think how we should understand them.

These are the crucial comments of Periyar on the scene in which Sita refuses to stay back at Ayodhya while Rama was leaving for exile.

"She was discarded within a few days after her marriage by Bharata". (p. 24)

Rama said to Sita, "You do not deserve the praise of Bharata." (p. 24).

"This was also admitted by Sita herself when she told Rama, "I do not like to live with Bharata who despises me." (p. 24).... "What am I to do? Bharata does not like me. How could I stay with him!" (p. 61).

What are these oddities?

What is this abandonment of Sita by Bharata?

Was there any marriage between Bharata and Sita? Where is the question of Bharata hating Sita? Bharata was not present at Ayodhya! According to the story, Bharata left for his maternal uncle's place a long time ago after his marriage. He did not return since then. He meets his brother only at Chitrakuta. Even in Tamil translations, the story proceeded as if Bharata returned to Ayodhya after his father's death, didn't it? Periyar made these strange comments based on Sita's words, "I will not stay at Ayodhya!" Is there any other basis for these comments?

(**3**) Sita has craze for jewels. She wants luxuries and pomp.

"Rama having in mind her pompousness and fragility of mind he directed that she should strip off all her ornaments if she were to accompany him to the forest." (p. 24)...."Sita did accordingly, but again she put on some other jewels unknowingly." (p. 25)

Yet, Sita kept some jewels with her secretly. This is another accusation against Sita.

Valmiki wrote that, when Rama asked Sita to "donate every thing", "Sita Devi at once began to donate very happily as per the husband's order (*bharturjaagna*)... She began to give money and gems to virtuous people liberally." As the poet mentioned only money and gems, Periyar inferred a great meaning that Sita kept some jewels secretly. The poet said that she began donating (*upacharkrame* = began). She started just now. Can't we infer that she gave away jewels also later? The poet said, she did as per husband's order. Why was not Periyar concerned with this? Why this mean attempt to degrade Sita?

Rama and Lakshmana wore jute clothes but Sita refused to wear such clothes! (p. 25) This also is utterly untrue. Sita was ready to wear them. However, priests said that it was not necessary for her to wear. Dasaratha gave clothes and jewels. In this respect, there is no scope for her likes or dislikes.

When her mother-in-law (*Kausalya*) advised her, "Be obedient to your husband during exile", Sita replied "insolently", says Periyar! Even then she did not take out the jewels. Bharata had contempt for Sita because of such bad qualities and Kaika refused to permit Sita to remain in the country and sent her away to the forest — These are Periyar's comments.

(**4**) Another accusation is that Sita is a big liar! Based on the inconsistency in the ages of Sita and Rama, Periyar calculated as he pleased. Finally, he concluded that Sita was 45 years old when she talked to Ravana. Periyar says that Sita conceals her actual age and told less age to Ravana. He also concluded that Sita was an aged woman. "This is confirmed by Lakshmana. He said that Sita was an aged lady with overlapping belly." (p. 53). Then why did Ravana carry away such an ugly woman?

He has no minimum common sense that Lakshmana commented so about Sita while making fun of Surpanakha. Sita is an aged woman since Lakshmana said so! Moreover, he is accusing that Sita lied about her age!

(**5**) "It was for a set purpose that Sita was left alone in the forest to make it easy for Ravana to carry her away and was making preparations accordingly." (p. 42)

Rama wanted to kill Ravana. There must be some reason for him to attack Ravana. The reason that Ravana was harassing sages is not enough. There must be a reason that concerns Rama so that he can interfere. If Ravana abducted Rama's wife, Rama could enter the arena to fight with Ravana. Then Rama would not be at fault. It was the poet who made this plan, not Rama. The story did not proceed in such a way that Rama intentionally left Sita alone and skipped away.

(**6**) "Sita abused Lakshmana in a crude language. Even a rude woman would not talk like that. Lakshmana trembled with fear, lowered his head and talked very obediently." (p. 52). Here Periyar praised Lakshmana and abused Sita.

See what the same man says while criticising Lakshmana. "His behaviour towards Sita was such that made her suspect that he had a love towards her and that he wanted to enjoy her." (p. 33)

As he has to conclude that Sita is a wicked woman in the chapter on Sita, he praised

Lakshmana and said that 'Sita abused such a good man without any reason.' There it is not possible to find fault with Sita unless he says Lakshmana is a good man. In the context when he wanted to say that Lakshmana is a wicked person, he commented that he had behaved with a bad, lustful attitude!

All that Periyar did — about the qualities of the character which he does not like — was this kind of criminal investigation. If we ask him, "Well, is Lakshmana a good man or bad man? Is Sita a good woman or bad woman? You are contradicting yourself!", then he would say, "Oh, they are Aryans!"

(7) "When an outside man came and described her limbs including her breasts Sita kept quiet. She even gave him food and hospitality. If Sita was of a good character, would she do like this?' asks Periyar. (p. 52) Yes. Sita treated Ravana with hospitality in spite of his nasty talk. The story proceeded as if Sita was not angry. It is because of the convention of mythological stories. In such stories, they praise women like that. They say, "O woman with good breasts! O woman with good buttocks!" If some one wants to criticize, he has to criticise the poet, not the characters. Periyar finds fault with Sita because Sita was not angry at Ravana's description. Well, what will Periyar, who finds fault with Sita, say about Ravana? Will it not be Ravana'a fault to speak all obscene words to a woman when she is alone and when her men are not at home? Why did Periyar not notice even a single fault in Ravana while describing his qualities? Does he say, "A man will speak as he likes if the woman is favourable to him. What is wrong with the man?" If it is so, should we consider such a man as a noble person?

(8) Periyar made many attempts to prove that Ravana did not abduct Sita but Sita herself went with Ravana willingly. "If in the teeth of such curses there had been any physical contact while carrying her, his head and body should have been reduced to dust. However, nothing did happen to him....What then does it mean? (p. 54)

By this Periyar meant that Sita herself had gone with Ravana.

If we go by the story, what was the curse of Ravana? What did the poet say about it? Brahma's curse to Ravana: "Hereafter, if you molest other's woman forcibly, your head will break."

Nalakubara's curse to Ravana: "When this wicked man desires to have intercourse. (*dharsha yishyati*) forcefully with a woman against her will, then his head will break into pieces."

This forceful molestation refers to sexual relationship only. The curse does not apply to abduction. Our argument should be in accordance with the limitations of the curse, which the poet described. Periyar has modified this curse in his favour. "Ravana would have died if he had touched Sita, wouldn't he? Sita went with him willingly, didn't she?", Periyar says! All right! Has Periyar stood firmly on this argument. No. See how many kinds of arguments he put forward.

"Ravana visited Sita's abode with an intention to carry her away. On seeing her, he was captivated by her beauty. Ravana fell in love and advanced towards her."

Periyar says that Ravana came with an intention to abduct Sita! Earlier he said, Sita was very ugly. Here she becomes a very beautiful woman! Ravana here fell in love with Sita! See later!

"Ravana carried away Sita to Lanka as a retaliatory measure and not out of love towards Sita." (p. 41)

A while ago Ravana fell in love with Sita! Now, it is not love! Retaliation! A while ago, Sita went with Ravana willingly. Now, Rama abducted her. Was it the end? See later again!

"Sita ought to have followed Ravana voluntarily." (p. 28)

Periyar put these words in quotation marks as if he was citing others' words. He has not mentioned whose words were these. However, he defended this view completely. He said, 'yes'. 'Sita must have gone with Ravana willingly. Otherwise, it was not possible for Ravana to touch her? He has a curse against him, hasn't he?'

Again, at another place, he says, " He revealed to her that he was Ravana and urged her to start with him to Lanka. She refused. Presently with one hand, he seized her by the hair and with his other hand on her thighs he lifted her up and placed her on his thigh and carried her away. She cried." (p. 54)

While Ravana was carrying her away seated in his lap. She was half naked, herself denuding the upper half." (p.27)

"What is all this?

This is to say, 'Look at the fate of an Aryan woman!' and enjoy the scene, ridiculing her. Periyar has no idea that he was strongly proving that Ravana is a very wicked man. He was not aware that he was taking without any sense of context when he said, 'Sita went willingly' at one place and 'Ravana abducted Sita' at another place. He considered it a great act that a Dravidian man dragged an Aryan woman holding her lock of hair! But Mr. Periyar! A Dravidian woman will also become as helpless as Sita when an Aryan man holds her lock of hair and drags her. Do you think it is a matter of pride for Ravana to disturb Sita's clothing and abducting her violently? Defending and praising a man who insulted a woman with his arrogance of strength – Will this create aversion for Sita, who was help less? This will only reveal your 'racial chauvinism'.

From the proofs which Periyar showed the actual truth revealed and it is proved that Rakshasa abducted Sita forcibly, isn't it?

Is it over? See further.

"As soon as Sita stepped into Ravana's palace, her love towards Ravana grew more." (p.27)

How justified and how honest Periyar's process of argumentation!

(9) By now, Ravana reached his house. Now, all the thoughts of Periyar are concentrated on whether or not there is any physical relation between Sita and Ravana!

He said that Sita cried and refused to marry Ravana when Ravana asked her to marry him after he took her to Lanka. "But Sita closing her eyes, sobbed"…. "It may be inferred here that Sita did not give her consent to Ravana to co-habit her" (p. 27)

A while ago Sita's love for Ravana increased when she entered Ravana's chamber. Now, the love has gone!

Here, again, Periyar is in doubt about Sita. "She did not answer to the point. She was beating about the bush. 'I have no control over my body; but I can assure you of the purity of my mind' — In such qualified terms she had replied." (p. 55)

When Sita said, "My body was not under my control. What could I do?", what did she talk about? To what did Periyar apply these words? Notice Sita's words, "My lord! When I was not under my control, another man touched me (*vivasa* = who was under the control of others; *aham* =I; *gatra samsparsam* = touch of the body; *gataa* = I got; *asmiyadi* = If I were; me = my; *kaamakaaraha* =wish; *n* =no). In this matter god is at fault. At that moment my heart — which others cannot grasp — was concentrated on you only. I had no freedom in respect of my body, which was under other's control. What can I do?"

Sita said these words with reference to going with Ravana. Not with an intention to say, "I had sexual relations with Ravana. What can I do?" Even if it had happened so, what would be Sita's fault? Even then, Sita's argument would be the same. But according to this story, Sita is a great chaste and devoted wife. If she had a relationship with an outside man, she thinks her chastity has gone. Then she would admit, "yes. Now I am not a chaste woman." But, here, Sita is not talking about such a situation. She is talking about her abduction by Ravana. But Periyar is applying Sita's words to sex relationship and commenting, "In such qualified terms she had replied." Sita replied in unqualified terms." I was not as you thought. I swear. You must believe me….. Leave doubt about me. (*sape* = I swear; *sankaantu* = doubt; *parityaja* = leave). When she said so clearly, is it replying in 'qualified terms'?

All right! Let us suppose Sita's words refer to sexual relationship. Let us also suppose that Sita said those words with the following meaning, "What can I do? I could not protect my body. That is why it happened so!" If this has happened, does it not mean that Ravana molested her against her will while her heart was concentrated on her husband, will it not be Ravana's wickedness? But Periyar thinks that: Ravana does not molest her since he has a curse. Sita was willing when she was with Ravana. But, she is speaking like an innocent woman in the presence of her husband.

But, whoever may speak in whatever manner, it should not cross the limits of the story. Finally, what is the conclusion? It was proved in the fire test that Sita remained a chaste woman and she did not have relationship with Ravana. Therefore the criticism that Sita's words are not straight forward (qualified) is totally worthless.

(10) Periyar has shown two more odd proofs. The first one: There is, according to Periyar, an incident in *Chandravati's* Bengali *Ramayana* as follows: Rama's elder sister Kukuvati tells Rama secretly, 'See, Sita has drawn the picture and pressing it against her bosom.' (*So, if Rama has a sister, she too would be like Rama!*) When Rama went to Sita's room, Sita was really doing like that.

"….Kukuvathy approached Rama and said to him…(p. 28)….. "He sighed and went out with his sister Kukuvathy to Sita's apartment. She was found sleeping pressing to her breast the hand-fan in which Ravana's picture was drawn." (p. 29)

The second one: In C.R. Srinivasa Ayyangar's '*Notes on Ramayana*', "Sita was caught red handedly by Rama that she had drawn the picture of Ravana". (p. 29)

To show Sita's qualifications in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Periyar is pointing to the story in Chandravati's *Ramayana* and Srinivasa Ayyangar's '*Notes*'! What should we call such 'Periyars'? That is such 'elderly persons'? Why should he still have the name 'Periyar'?

Periyar had become wild because Kamba portrayed Rama's character very delicately and without many mistakes, hadn't he?

'Read only Valmiki. See how Rama is portrayed in it. We should not rely on other *Ramayana*s. They made many modifications', Periyar has said, hasn't he? He even scolded that translator as 'villainous Kamban' for making such modifications, didn't he? Why then, Periyar, is relying on other *Ramayana*s, instead of Valmiki *Ramayana*, to judge Sita's qualities? Can someone gather bad qualities and abuses from all versions of *Ramayana* at one place and say. "Look! What a mean fellow Ravana is!"

If one wants to examine Sita of Valmiki *Ramayana*, one has to base on what Valmiki wrote. One should not add other stories! Similarly, if we want to examine Sita of Bengali *Ramayana*, we have to base ourselves on its contents only. And we should not add any thing from Valmiki *Ramayana*. Ignoring such a commonsensical point, is it 'elderliness'? When there are many genuine points by which one can prove that injustice had been done to Dravidians in Valmiki's work and *to shut the mouths* of (silence) Aryan devotees, Mr. Periyar! Do you need to follow so many wrong paths?

While Valmiki wrote all sorts of lies to glorify Aryans with meanness, Dravidian Periyar is also proving, 'yes we too!'

To prove that 'Sita is bad! Sita is bad!', Periyar made all sorts of mean attempts throughout his essay and finally concluded very clearly thus, "As regards Sita I say that she was not morally pure because of her illicit intimacy with Ravana." (p. 29)

If Sita is morally impure due to illicit intimacy, is Ravana not morally impure due to the same intimacy?

Observe further.

"From a close study of *Ramayana* by

Valmiki it is clear that Sita's pregnancy was not by Rama." (p. 30) To prove that it was not Rama who was responsible for Sita's pregnancy (that is to prove that Ravana was responsible), the attempts which Periyar made are not few!

Let us examine Valmiki *Ramayana* carefully. If we examine it so carefully, Mr. Periyar, shall we see the hand-fan which Kukuvati informed and Ravana's figure which Srinivasa Ayyangar drawn?

If we examine Valmiki *Ramayana* carefully, we find its story as follows: Rama came to Ayodhya along with Sita, had coronation and began to rule the kingdom. "While Sita and Rama enjoyed all pleasure, ten thousand years have passed", says the poet. (*This means, we have to convert this statement in reality that certain period of time has passed.*)

One day Rama asked, "Sita! The time has approached for me to get sons by you (*Your delivery time is approaching*), what do you want?"

Sita: "Raghava! I would like to visit the holy hermitages of sages on the bank of Ganga. I would like to stay at least one night in the garden of penance."

This is what appears if you examine Valmiki's story.

Between the time after Sita coming from Lanka and the time of her pregnancy, there is some time. (*According to the story, it is ten thousand years.*)

To argue that Sita became pregnant due to Ravana, this time gap is irritating to Periyar. So he has to get rid of this time gap. Periyar has done the same thing. According to Periyar, C.R. Srinivasa Ayyangar observed, "The passing of 10 thousand-year period before Rama sent Sita to the forest is an Interpolation!" What is a happier thing than this Interpolation for Periyar? Either for devotees of Rama or devotees of Ravana — for any gentleman — whatever they do not like, it is an Interpolation! Therefore, Periyar liked this Interpolation very much. What would have happened if Srinivasa Ayyangar did not write that this period is an Interpolation? What would happen? If that gentleman did not write, this gentleman would write so! Periyar happily endorsed Ayyangar's view.

"It is stated that this verse was interpolated to keep Sita beyond suspicion. Thus Sita's pregnancy was found out within a month and there after she was taken to the forest by Lakshmana." (p. 31)

What is there, if not arrogance to say, "Our Dravidian man is the cause of the pregnancy of the Aryan woman."

Why does Periyar have so much grudge against the character of Sita? Because Sita is an Aryan woman. Because Sita refused relation with Ravana.

It is this gentleman's vow to handover Sita to Ravana somehow. He resorted to this kind of bad criticism to make Dravidian devotees happy by telling them that Sita had relationship with Ravana.

"Will a man of any race keep quiet without having relationship with the woman of another race whom he abducted?" — If Periyar had said this, it would have been more reasonable than this filthy prattle. But, even if he had said so, Ravana would become a wicked character, won't he? Therefore, what Periyar wanted to say is this: 'Sita went along with Ravana willingly. She became pregnant in Lanka. Meanwhile, Rama fought with Ravana and killed him. Sita had to come back to Rama. But, Rama came to know about Sita's pregnancy, he abandoned her.' This is the essence of his research.

It is Periyar's view that if the relationship between Sita and Ravana is proved, it is an insult to Sita but not to Ravana. 'If a woman is willing, what is the fault of a man?' — This is the attitude of Periyar. This is why, he beat the drum, "That pregnancy is due to our Dravidian king, you know!"

While criticising Valmiki that he degraded women, what respect has this man given to women?

Periyar is not concerned with the degradation of Dravidian women. He is not worried about hundreds of wives around

Ravana. He has no sympathy or kindness. Then, how can he be concerned with Aryan women? The more he degrades an Aryan woman the more happy he will be. He feels happy in using filthy words about them.

Referring to the fire test, Ravana's devotee Periyar says, "If we carefully go through Valmiki *Ramayana* we find that Sita was pregnant at that time and the pregnancy was of three months." (p. 64)

"In the end, when Rama asked her to swear as to her purity, she did not do it; but she sank herself down into the earth and disappeared." (p. 55)

Is 'sinking into the earth' not a proof? A throne coming from the crest of the earth, Goddess of earth coming up and taking away Sita with respect — Does this not mean that Sita has proved her chastity. If this is not a proof, what should she do? What an action of women will convince this Dravidian writer regarding the character of women?

The surprising thing here is that Periyar has not found any thing wrong in Rama asking Sita to prove her chastity. This is in fact some thing for which one should condemn Rama. One should say, "Sita proved her chastity in Lanka itself through fire test. Yet he abandoned her. Now again, he is asking her to prove her chastity. See what sort of man this Rama is!"

But, here, Periyar has not found any fault with Rama. Here also he found fault with Sita. 'She did not prove herself! She had sunk down into the earth!', complains Periyar!

Here, Aryan-Dravidian distinction disappeared. Periyar got united with Rama. Here man-woman distinctions revealed. Periyar found it reasonable that Rama has asked Sita to prove her chastity for the second time!

Finally, this writer concluded about Sita as follows: Throughout the story, Sita appears to be a very ordinary woman, "with no good qualities that are requisites of a well-bred, modest and chaste woman." (p.50)

This is a criticism not only against Sita but against all ordinary women as well.

This means, ordinary women, who are not 'well bred' do not possess humility, chastity or any good quality! If humility and good character are so good qualities, why should not men also possess them? Why should women alone possess them? — There is no thought as to what it means when he utters a word!

Periyar has grudge against Sita because she did not yield to Ravana. Though he made many kinds of accusations, he could not prove any one of them. He revealed not Sita's meanness but his own meanness.

Periyar — who examined the qualities of Sita and Ravana with such fairness and impartiality, finally concluded:

"If we entrust the entire matter for investigation with a C.I.D. officer for exploring the truth in the alleged complaint against Ravana that he seduced Sita and the investigation report is placed before an impartial judge for decision and if the case is conducted on behalf of Rama as complainant and Ravana as the accused, we are quite confident that the judge will decide in favour of Ravana by pronouncing that he is an innocent man and that he has been unnecessarily blackmailed." (p. 65)

Here, Periyar has forgotten one important point. He has forgotten to mention that the CID officer and the judge must be a Dravidian chauvinist like him. Of course, in asking for 'an impartial judge', there is a hint that he must give judgement favourable to Ravana. What Periyar expects the judge to say in his judgement is this: 'Sita willingly ran after Ravana and Ravana did not abduct her. Sita desired Ravana and got those children.' If he says so in the judgment, he will be an impartial judge. Otherwise, partial judge!

Periyar has utterly failed to understand that Dravidian chauvinism and Dravidian vileness are not an answer to Aryan chauvinism and Aryan vileness!

Expressing his views on Valmiki *Ramayana* in this manner, Periyar questioned, "Is either

Rama or *Ramayana* eligible for our respect and reverence?"

He further says, "In this age, when science has so much developed, taking advantage of the conditions and ignorance of non-Brahmins, the Brahmins are still singing the same old song. It is our wish to raise the consciousness of the people so that they understand all these facts and question devotees of Rama!" (p. 60)

Mr. Periyar! People who acquire the consciousness of questioning devotees of Rama will not stop there. They will also question devotees of Ravana as well.

At the very beginning of his critique, Periyar said that there is nothing that is useful to Dravidians. Not only for Dravidians. There is nothing useful even to Aryan people and Aryan women also.

Periyar has not shown sincerity anywhere in his criticism. His criticism does not proceed with self-respect.

What is the difference between Aryan Valmiki and Dravidian Periyar?

While Valmiki eulogises Rama with favouritism for Aryans, Periyar eulogises Ravana with favouritism for Dravidians.

Valmiki could not find even a single fault in Rama, who possessed lakh bad qualities.

It is the same case with Periyar in respect of Ravana who has lakh bad qualities!

Periyar has as much grudge against Aryan women as Valmiki had against Dravidian women.

While Valmiki has Aryan chauvinism, Periyar has Dravidian chauvinism!

★ ★

Some concluding Remarks on the 'Critics of *Ramayana*'

So far we have examined various kinds of criticism of *Ramayana*.

Some critics held Aryan vs Dravidian perspective, some held Brahmin vs Sudra perspective and yet others Man vs Woman perspective. Those critics showed interest in whatever aspect they could perceive. Had their criticism been proper, all those kinds of criticism would have been helpful and useful to us for understanding *Ramayana*. Instead of paying homage to the sanctity of *Ramayana*, had these critics exposed the racial chauvinism, caste oppression and male domination, they would have contributed to a new kind of consciousness among the readers. But these critics have not undertaken the task properly.

The critics who made a scathing attack on the wrong doings of an Aryan king paid homage to the Dravidian king. The critics who projected Brahmins as culprits acquitted kings as innocents. The critics who wanted to rescue women from the domination of their husbands kept those women under the domination of other men. Except dragging people from one kind of faulty relation to another, what could these kinds of criticism teach people?

Unless one examines any religious text from a 'class perspective', it is not possible to understand that text from all angles in their interconnection.

The Brahmin caste as such is not an enemy of the Sudra caste. The exploiting class that initiated the caste distinctions and which tries to sustain them even today is the enemy of the Sudra caste. Such Class society is the enemy of not only Sudras but also of poor Brahmins. One ought to see from the perspective of 'rich vs poor' but not from the perspective of castes, races and regions.

People belonging to all castes, races and regions who are subjected to exploitation of labour, constitute one Class. Exploitation of labour is the root cause of all the evils that cropped up in human society. Therefore, without considering the class distinctions, teachings against caste oppression, racial chauvinism and male domination are superficial and cannot properly contribute to the enlightenment of the people. Such teachings (with their many short comings) cannot show the path of liberation from oppression, chauvinism and domination of all kinds. ★

[Translation: **B.R. Bapuji**]

Part 4

Comments on 'The *Poisonous Tree*' (Both Positive and Negative)

[When the first volume of the Telugu version of 'The *Poisonous Tree*' appeared in 1974, some people liked the book very much. Some people criticised it severely. Some magazines welcomed it and published favourable reviews. Couple of magazines got wild and opposed the book. Some 'big' newspapers *swallowed* the review copies and kept quiet. Radio reviewers also maintained silence. The letters that I received were also of various kinds. Some were very happy, some opposed vehemently. Some were moderately happy while some were moderately opposed. Irony, ridicule, individual abuses, individual praise — I received all sorts of reactions. Comments that I heard through individuals were also of two types.

I am giving here some such comments and my answers. At the end, I will also quote some comments of the reviewers and individual readers.]

***Comment:* Is it not more useful to pay attention to the contemporary problems rather than taking an ancient text like *Ramayana* as an object of criticism?**

Answer: Are religion and devotion to god not contemporary problems? The criticism of *Ramayana* is a criticism of superstitions. It is a criticism of feudal culture; a criticism of the rule of the rich. A criticism of not only *Ramayana* but any religious text implies criticism of contemporary problems. An attempt which opens the eyes of the people who are deep in slavish ideas and traditions and who extol them to be great truths and ideas – such an attempt, however little it may be — is not futile.

You said that *Ramayana* propagates feudal culture. You can express this view in the form of essays. Why do you rewrite the entire story?

To tell something, one can write a story or an essay. One can write in any form: a song, play or poetry. However, it is appropriate to choose the form based on the content. If we express our criticism of *Ramayana* in the form of stories, it will be appropriate since we can also observe the characters. Of course, we have not only stories every where. We also have essays. The entire 'Preface' is an essay. All the footnotes are essays. Whatever be the form in which we write, we must be concerned with the correctness of what we write.

Have you titled your book as 'The *Poisonous Tree*' as opposed to Viswanatha Satyanarayana's 'Kalpavruksham' (The wishing tree)?

I do not think you will put this question if you have read 'The *Poisonous Tree*'. Though I heard the title 'Kalpa vruksham', it was not there in my mind. Every religious text seemed to be a *Poisonous Tree* since I began to understand Marxism. Every exploitative society is a *Poisonous Tree*. *Ramayana* has all the features of exploitative society. If we understand all of them, it is a *Poisonous Tree*. Hence that name!

Why do you criticise *Ramayana*, which was written many thousands of years ago from the Marxist perspective of the recent times? It is very strange.

Many people have this doubt. This doubt is possible if one does not know about Marxism. Marxism is a recent perspective. However, what it tells is not a recent truth. The truth is older than the period of *Ramayana*. Marxism tells us about exploitation of labour and class distinctions. The classes and class exploitation had been there much before the period of *Ramayana*. However, it took so much time to discover this truth. See an example. Human beings discovered the fact that earth is round only recently. Well, does this mean that the earth has been round only since they discovered the truth or was it also round much before that? The earth has been round for millions of years. However, human beings were not aware of this truth until a long period. They came to know about it only recently. It is exactly the same case with 'exploitation of labour' as well. It has been taking place for thousands of years. The society in the story of *Ramayana* is also a society based on exploitation. It was only recently that we discovered about exploitation through Marx. If we examine the past with this new knowledge, we can understand how the past looked like. We can find every thing in *Ramayana*: rich-poor distinctions, rule of the kings, battles for the sake of land, master hood and servitude and so on. Based on these features, we can understand that society as the one where exploitation of society took place. If we know what Marxism is, the question, "How come you criticise *Ramayana* of the past from the Marxist perspective of the recent times" will not arise.

I do not have any problem with your criticism that you made in 'The *Poisonous Tree*'. However, it seemed to be somewhat 'extreme'.

It would have been nice had you explained where it is somewhat extreme. While it seemed 'somewhat extreme' to you, it seemed 'more extreme' to others. According to you, I have to reduce extremity to some extent. Others do not like such reduction. According to them, I have to extremely reduce the 'extremity'. Then you will not like it. It is not possible for the writer to reduce it in such a way that all people like it.

You have not given proper place to the fact that *Ramayana* is a story connected with Aryan and Dravidian races. Why?

There is no doubt that *Ramayana* is a story connected with two hostile races or tribes. However, it is not enough if we simply reduce *Ramayana* to the battle between races. There are many more things. This is not simply a story about the battles between different races. There were property disputes within a single race. There was a dispute in Rama's race for the sake of kingdom. (Though Bharata did not quarrel!) There were property disputes between Vali and Sugriva in Vanara race and between Ravana and Vibhishana in the Rakshasa race. There were class distinctions in all the races. The conditions of women wee degrading in all the races. All these are important issues in *Ramayana*. Therefore, when we examine this story, we have to pay attention to all these features along with the feature of 'battle between races.'

In the '*Poisonous Tree*', the story of real *Ramayana* is upturned. Should we read your book by standing on the head?

If the story of *Ramayana* is upturned and became 'the *Poisonous Tree*', I am not responsible for that. It is its nature. You ask me why I presented an episode in a particular manner or you think along those lines. You will find an answer.

'*Ramayana* is a reflection of fights between Kshatriyas and Brahmins. King Janaka was the representatives of Kshatriyas.

Since Viswamitra was a Kshatriya, he tried to lead a revolt against Brahmins by making Rama as the son-in-law of Janaka.' — This is how I read in some books. What is your opinion on this?

If we look at things without going beyond Valmiki *Ramayana*, we find conflicts between Brahmins and Kshatriyas only in the case of Viswamitra and Vasista and Rama and Parasurama only. Viswamitra finally became a Brahmin and reached a stage where he respected Brahmin-hood. This means the Kshatriya character of Viswamitra had changed. Similarly, Parasurama had also compromised and kept quiet. There is no evidence to say that king Janaka had rivalry with Brahmins. When king Janaka fixed marriage alliances for his daughters, he said to Viswamitra, "Please accept my kingdom, my brother's kingdom and the kingdom of Dasaratha as well!" It is a character that has so much humility and obedience for priests. To arrive at a conclusion that Viswamitra tried to make Rama revolt against Brahmins, there should be some evidence in the original. There is no such evidence in the story.

Is it because that you felt it is not enough to see poor people in 'revolutionary poetry' that you have dumped them into *Ramayana* also?

None has dumped poor people into *Ramayana*. There are beggars beside Sri Rama. There are prostitutes beside Sita Devi. Holiness of *Ramayana* could not uplift them. See these things in the actual story.

You have to see *Ramayana* as a spiritual text.

I would have seen so, if there was any spirituality! I have not found it anywhere in the text. All that appeared were: desire for kingdom, desire for riches, desire for wealth, desire for power, desire for women and desire for wars. Only insane and deceitful persons can see spirituality in the midst of so many desires.

You think poets like Valmiki served as an army of pens of a particular kind of society. We feel that you too are serving another kind of society.

Yes, you have rightly understood. Every writer is a soldier of pens in any society of any period. The question, however, is whom does that soldier side? In society of class distinctions, siding the rich class and siding the poor class are not the same. The former relates to injustice while the latter relates to justice. This does not mean, poets in the past did all this consciously. Whether consciously or unconsciously, what the poets in the past did was siding the rich class. We have to understand this point.

Food is important to human beings. However, it is strange to think that life is a matter of food. It is strange to link a beautiful epic like *Ramayana* with problems of daily life.

These are the words of people — who have four days food in advance and who can accumulate wealth enough for four generations! 'Is food important? It is somewhat important but is it so important?' — Do we hear these words from any poor man? If the situation demands that one has to struggle for food by pulling a rickshaw, even 'Krishna Sastry' (the famous romantic Telugu poet) looks for customers for his rickshaw. Any way, is it the question of food alone that we discussed in the *Poisonous Tree*?

".....What is the use in criticising Valmiki today?"

The question is not whether Valmiki is alive or not. Valmiki is not merely an individual. He is a literary representative of a class. Criticising Valmiki implies criticising the work of Valmiki. It is like criticising the social values, which Valmiki propagates.

Whatever you want to say, you can tell them, still delicately. What can you achieve by writing in such a way that it hurts some people?

Are the contents of *Ramayana* very

delicate? "Women are base... mean... fickle minded.... They always try to quarrel. They try to spilt friends. We have to always doubt women" — Are these words very delicate? Don't they hurt any one?

"Sudras are prohibited from learning mantra.... from getting education. They have to serve upper castes and be obedient to them." — These words are very delicate, aren't they? They do not hurt any one, do they? Do you think delicacy is in Sanskrit language and poetry with certain meter? Are you not able to see the wounds, which feudal texts have been causing? It is obvious what sort of delicacy you have! Delicacy and harshness are not connected with language and poetry. They are connected with justice and injustice. Justice for labouring class is delicacy. Contrary to it is harshness. Search for delicacy in this manner.

Most part of *Ramayana* consists of myths. Can we see culture based on such myths?

Even in the mythological writings, we find social issues. Based on those issues we see that culture. Golden deer is a myth. However, abducting women of hostile tribe is not a myth. Burning of Lanka is a myth. However, destroying the territories of enemies is not a myth. Fire test is a myth. However, husbands suspecting their wives and rejecting them are not myths. Therefore, we can see society even in mythological stories.

It is said that when a hunter shot a male bird in a pair of pigeons, Valmiki's heart was filled with grief and poetry came out of that great sage. I do not mean that you are not aware of this. Because Valmiki was so moved and wrote *Ramayana*, it is so merciful....

Why, then, Rama shot arrows at so many birds while he stayed so many years in the forest? What did he eat without shooting some male or female bird or animal and without separating any pair? Valmiki himself wrote with excitement that Rama had frightening form which made birds and animals shudder! When Rama shot arrows at birds why did any sage, let alone Valmiki, feel sad? If there is so much brutality in a hunter killing birds for the livelihood, what about Rama hunting so many animals for food — more than what was necessary? Why have you not thought like this?

In your book, we find opposition towards not only *Ramayana* but also towards very ancient and holy Vedic culture....

If there is any reference to Vedic culture in the '*Poisonous Tree*', I took it based on evidence available in *Ramayana*. Other than that, I do not know about Vedas. Suppose my criticism against the story and the characters of *Ramayana* also applies to Vedas. This means the teachings in both texts are similar. That is why, criticism against *Ramayana* is applicable to Vedas also. If both have the same culture, then we have to oppose both. You have added the adjectives 'ancient' and 'holy' to Vedic culture. Once exploitation of labour had begun, any culture, which defends that exploitation is not holy. We need not respect it. We can retain 'ancient' literature for the sake of knowing, 'once literature was in this form'. Just because it is ancient, we need not respect it for that reason.

Is there any text which people of Ravana's race made Ravana a hero and Rama his enemy?

I do not know. A reader wrote to me that Gonds (a tribe) worship Ravana. I do not know more than this.

My mother usually reads books. She likes all your books. However, she speaks very negatively about the '*Poisonous Tree*'. She says, we cannot find anywhere the place that women have in our country. She likes Rama more than Sita.

To say, 'we can't find anywhere the place that women have in our country' is not love for the country. It is national chauvinism that makes people proudly feel that their country alone is great. If women themselves believe that this society is respecting women a lot, this means the society is able to mislead so effectively. What more evidence do we need to understand as to what extent the army of pens has blunt the consciousness of women for several generations in the name of ancient culture? In the case of aged women and illiterate men and women, we can be somewhat sympathetic to whatever they speak. We, however, need not give importance to those people who know everything but say, 'Our culture is very holy, very pious'.

Do you know Sanskrit? It is not a feature of a good critic to criticise based on translations. To understand Bhagavatgita, devotion is enough. To understand Bharata, we need intelligence along with devotion. Whereas to understand *Ramayana*, we need capability along with devotion and intelligence. Without extraordinary knowledge of Sanskrit, none can understand *Ramayana*.

I do not know Sanskrit. I have depended on translations only. On three translations. I have not written anything without clearly understanding a point — whether it is a major point or minor point. I gave foot notes also. I have not spoiled the descriptions of Valmiki. (Of course, all the descriptions in *Poisonous Tree* are not from *Ramayana*). What I ask you is: Is it necessary to possess knowledge of Sanskrit to put questions like, 'Bharata should get the kingdom, shouldn't he? Rama knew about it, didn't he? Then, how was he prepared for coronation?' Is it necessary to know Sanskrit to ask 'Did Rama have no selfishness in killing Vali? Is it necessary to know Sanskrit to question the story and the values of *Ramayana*? Those who speak in defence of Rama — do they have great scholarship in Sanskrit and read it in Sanskrit? All the pundits who put many efforts and translated *Ramayana* have devotion, intelligence and capacity, don't they? Devotees who do not know Sanskrit are also reading these scholars, aren't they? If we cannot know the story through translation, why do we need translation? To understand any Sanskrit text, knowledge of Sanskrit is not necessary. Translations are enough! They have their own use! Suppose a reader read *Ramayana* in Sanskrit. Even then, let us say, she raised some questions as follows: 'Why was Rama ready for coronation? Why did he abuse his father? Why did he kill Vali? Why did he fight a battle with Khara while he was leading the life of a sage? Why did he harass Surpanakha? Why did he suspect Bharata who sacrificed the kingdom for his sake?'

Whatever way you reply to these questions, you ought to reply in the same manner to the questions put in the '*Poisonous Tree*'. One should not bully, 'You do not know Sanskrit. How can you understand it?'

It seems you think that you will get fame if you criticise a story, which is spread across not only in India but also in many other countries.

Yes, sir! This is exactly what I thought. You have rightly understood me. When you say that it is a story, which is spread across all countries, it means people of those countries have lot of faith in that book. When some one criticises such a book, which many people believe, do we get fame or lose fame? We get fame only if people like the criticism. From where do they get fame if people oppose such a criticism?

I did not think about getting or losing fame. I thought of telling certain things and I told them.

We have to see how you will sell the '*Poisonous Tree*' — by weight or in any other form!

It is wrong to think that sales of a book determine its importance. The value of a book does not increase because of its sales.

People say that Sri Ramachandra released Ramadasu after paying money to Nawab Tanisha. Is such miracle possible?

Answer to your question is very short. It is enough if I say, 'Do not believe such mythical stories.' But it may be difficult for you to get rid of the doubt. According to that story, do you know when Rama paid that money? Twelve years after Ramadas was imprisoned. By then the period of Ramadasu's sentence was over! Well, what is the need of the god to save him? Any way the period of sentence ends. Devotees may get a doubt as to why Rama could not rescue a great devotee like Ramadas when he was imprisoned. Therefore, in order to save Rama's reputation, poets create this kind of stories. As per the story, every body knows that Ramadas was in the prison for some time. Because of this fact, it is not possible to say that Rama got Ramadas released at once, isn't it? Ramadas faced the fruits of his deeds for some time. By then, Sri Rama showed his mercy. He goes to Tanisha with bow in one hand and money bag in another hand. He pays money and takes a receipt as a precaution, suspecting that whether Tanisha releases Ramadas or not. This is the story! Now, think for your self, using the brain which the nature gave and the experience which the society gave!

Some women did not like *Poisonous Tree*. What do you say about it?

What do I say? I say nothing. It is all right! Why are you so excited if women did not like *Poisonous Tree*? Many men also liked it. What do you say about it?

If there are any defects in the character of Rama, the poet is responsible. How will it be a mistake of Rama?

If the poet himself shows 'wrong Rama', where from do we get a 'right Rama' without any connection with the poet? Do you know the story of *Ramayana*, which was in currency before Valmiki? Based on whose writing you came to know about Rama? If the poet is responsible for the wrongs of Rama, the poet himself is responsible for nobility in Rama. Isn't he? Do you say that goodness is Rama's own effort while the badness is poet's mistake? The poet did not intend under any moment to make Rama a bad man. He showed all societal features in Rama. He showed them so, thinking that they were great values! Hypocrisy, dissimulation, arrogance, cruelty, thirst for power — all these are great values of a society of kings. As the nature of those qualities is revealing themselves today at least to some extent, devotees of Rama are unable to think whom to blame. The character of Rama consists of not only the features which the society taught him but also individual defects as well. Bharata who was in the same society does not have desire for the kingdom. According to the story, there is nobility in Bharata which Rama does not have in any aspect. Of course, Bharata too has many defects along with that 'nobility'. Such defects are there in all characters. The poet (or poets) who portrayed these characters has (have) the societal influences as well as individual defects. Therefore, Valmiki who portrayed Rama's character under the influence of society is not at fault. The entire fault lies in the present day devotees of Rama who *keep* the value of that society *over their heads* and adore them. They ought to treat *Ramayana* simply as a literature of a particular period. They should realise that it is reactionary not only now but also then. Without worshipping its holiness, they have to keep it safely in libraries.

Many great men studied *Ramayana*. Though they wrote about it in various ways, none called it a '*Poisonous Tree*'. Now, you attained the greatness of making it a

'*Poisonous Tree*'. You saw a *Poisonous Tree* in your analysis!

There are two ways before you. The first one: Do not give weight to the words of a person, which others did not utter earlier. The second one: Examine what the others said and why this person said so. If you say, 'As none has said so, nobody should say so in future. Let its holiness be there permanently', it is an uncivilised attitude. Not a theoretical discussion. Not even a minimum common sense.

However much we talk logically that we should consider Rama as human being, Rama appears to be a superhuman whenever I read a story concerning Rama.

'That great man.... that sea of mercy.... that annihilator of sins' — when these words are trumpeted around you, you feel the same way. This is what is called 'influence of the society'. If many people say something, we believe it. To understand whether it is correct or not, we need a new kind of thinking. If we examine the story from that angle, Rama appears simply as an ordinary prince who anxiously roams for the kingdom that he lost.

I do not think one should not make such a noise about *Ramayana*. It is a story about two men who fought for a woman.

The fight between two men for a woman implies a condition in society. It is not a story of two men only. There is also a woman in it. What is the role of that woman in the fight between those men? Why should two men fight unconcerned with the willingness or unwillingness of that woman? We have to examine all these aspects even when *Ramayana* has a particular feature that you have mentioned.

Why do you attack the ancient culture? Why don't you tell whatever you want to say?

What you call an 'ancient' culture is not an ancient culture. It is also the present culture. We will formulate a new culture in the course of our review with regard to what is good and what is bad in that culture; what should we accept and what should we reject and so on. For this purpose, we have to examine the old culture. We have to abandon bad and retain good in the old culture. Our examination of the old culture must be such that all people will have equal rights and equal responsibility. Only when we have such a perspective, we will know what sort of new ideas should replace the old ideas. Either new society or new culture (new life) does not come on its own. The new one does not begin suddenly from where the old one stops or breaks. We cannot create the new culture without abandoning the old culture after a criticism. The new culture evolves in the course of our criticism of the old one.

Talking to Vasanti, Urmila tells that an atheist Brahmin at her parental home told Sita about her future that she would become a devoted wife. Atheists do not believe in future telling, do they?

When I said future telling it does not mean that he said it on the basis of planets. It only needs that he observed Sita's mentality and said that she would like to be a devoted wife.

There is nothing wrong to criticise some aspects either in *Ramayana* or any other story which seems to be unjust. But what sort of criticism is it to criticise serenity in Rama's behaviour?

As per Valmiki's story, Rama is always seen *sprinkling* serenity. But why does not the character of a slave be so serene? In front of Rama, either Lakshmana or any other slave bend their shoulders and backs and stand in a twisted posture but they never exhibit serenity. Why? Should we assume that 'slaves always behave meanly and masters always behave nobly? However, rich or however poor, people will be serene or sad depending on the context. In fact, servants alone are more experienced in difficulties and they behave more serenely than the masters do. However, in the view of old poets (also in the view of the present writers) rich characters alone behave serenely. Serenity is always the property of masters. They alone behave nobly. This means serenity is not an individual feature of any character. The writer *coats* serenity to a character only if it is in a high social position. Those who own riches and wealth alone owned these serenity and smiles as well. Therefore, we need to rout out all the special characteristics that a poet attributes. When ants crawl on his back, even Rama has his serenity disturbed. By this, we have not slighted Rama. It is a rejection of a writing convention that 'noble men always behave with serenity'.

· ***Now, see comments of Mr. Viswanatha Satyanarayana on 'The Poisonous Tree.'***

"There is something called 'Kalpa vruksham' (the wishing tree in the Hindu Paradise). It gives what we want. I gave that name to my *Ramayana*. A gem of a woman wrote a *Ramayana* called '*Poisonous Tree*'. Good! Even poison is also one of the six *Rasas (Juices)*. It is also useful for living beings. While some living beings live in some Rasas, poisonous beings live in poison...." (Mr. Viswanatha Satyanarayana made these comments in his speech in a literary seminar held at Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, on December 14, 1974. Reported in Andhra Prabha, Telugu daily, dated 15-12-1974, p. 2)

While some beings live in other Rasas, some beings live in poison, don't they? Similarly, if 'exploitative beings' live in 'exploitative Rasa', beings opposed to it live in Rasa of justice. Thus, whatever Mr. Satyanarayana said is right.

· *Mr. Satyanarayana has also commented further as follows:*

"....Whoever may criticise *Ramayana* in whatever manner they like, it will not spoil the story of the epic....One understands the story of the epic in accordance with one's mentality (chitta vrutti)"

Mentality is class character. To those who have exploitative class character, *Ramayana* appears as 'the wishing tree' (in the Hindu Paradise). For those, who oppose exploitation, every religious text appears as *Poisonous Tree*. This is the secret of the mentality.

"......To secure the mercy of Parameswara (god), a being may behave either with a friendly attitude or hostility. In whatever manner s/he behaves, s/he will reach Parameswara. When Sanaka and Sanandas cursed Jaya and Vijaya, they reached Vishnu in three births out of hostile devotion (vairabhakti). I wrote 'Kalpa vruksham' with a view to reach Parameswara through friendship. That gem of a woman might have written '*Poisonous Tree*' with a view to reach Parameswara along the path of hatred with hostile attitude. (Vairabhavam)"

So, it is inevitable for me to reach god even if I wrote *Poisonous Tree*. On seeing me, will that god say, "Have you come? Did you write *Poisonous Tree*, in order to reach me early?"

"Nay! I was not interested to come here. I wrote it just to tell couple of things to the readers."

"All right. You alone — who wrote *Poisonous Tree* — have come, why hasn't that gentleman, who wrote *Kalpa vruksham* not come?" the god may be surprised.

"Don't you know this much? As I am your enemy, I came here within three births. But he is your devotee, isn't he? Therefore, he says, he would come late! Not in three births like me.... Still later.... after six births! That is his devotion!"

If this '*Poisonous Tree*' of *Ramayana* expands into several branches and stay in the hearts of future Indian children? No, it should not. What will remain if it sustains? The entire culture and respect of India will turn into ashes.

Because of this book, the Indian children will not lose any thing except the Shackles of slavery that this exploitative culture put on them!

★

[Readers who oppose this book must also know how readers who agree with this book feel. With this intention, I am giving here some positive comments on my book. However, one must not misunderstand me that I am giving these comments as they contain some sort of praise.]

"…..Very much revealing. Unless we make a serious class analysis as to why the same *Ramayana* is repeatedly written, we cannot uproot the *Poisonous Tree*."

"There are very few people who know the real face of Rama which a particular class considers as the most holy book that should be recited daily. This book will be useful to those young and old people who would like to know the truth genuinely with an impartial mind."

"….Even among those who consider themselves as revolutionaries, there is an attitude towards texts like *Ramayana* and *Bhaarata*. They say, 'why wasting time on such books?' We must say that they are unable to assess the impact of these texts on Indian culture. Their place in our society is extraordinary. Unless, we shake or doubt or demolish the holiness and piety of these texts there is nothing great that we can do."

"The scenes that depict as to what happened to Dasaratha after his death are completely imaginary and they stand as evidence to the imaginary power and creative ability of the authoress. The depiction resembles descriptions in mythological writings. The baseness and plight in the desire for heaven of kings, merchants, sages and devoted wives are beautifully expressed. The speciality of the freedom of soul of materialists is revealed. The writer followed the technique of ridiculing a myth like heaven by mythical description. This technique is **not** undesirable in narrative criticism."

"*Ramayana* served as a wishing tree that fulfils the wishes of one particular class while it gave many poisonous fruits as a *Poisonous Tree* to another class and turned its members not as human beings but as inferior and worse than animals. This is a wishing tree for ten out of hundred and a *Poisonous Tree* for the remaining ninety. That's why, the writer has thought appropriately and gave this title to the book."

"This writer has clearly shown how this social set up treated and transformed womankind."

"It will be very nice if this book is brought in other languages. There is good fire-wok in this book. Tamil and Hindi are enough to light the fire."

"If we examine scientifically, keeping in view the interests of the majority population, it will certainly be proved that this is an ideal text that it preaches (in the past as well as in the present) values that serve the exploiting classes and that aims at keeping all the labouring classes in permanent slavery. It is clear that this is a 'wishing tree' only for the exploiting classes and a *Poisonous Tree* for the oppressed classes. To prove these facts, Ranganayakamma made an effort on the basis of slokas in Valmiki *Ramayana*."

"Recently….. has come to our town to inaugurate a Telugu monthly titled…… There was some discussion on the *Poisonous Tree*. She talked very sarcastically about it pointing out to me. "What will happen to young people like him, if the *Poisonous Tree* grows, if its branches extend and its roots expand?" Of course, we have not kept quiet. We have strongly resisted her. There was some turmoil. She felt very upset because we are spoiled."

"Every progressive person, especially every intellectual who claims to be a Marxist and who has concern for the interests of the people of bottommost, oppressed classes ought to pay their attention to Cultural Revolution which is the basis for social revolution. A real effort is being done only now. Ranganayakamma's '*Ramayana*, the *Poisonous Tree*', which is close to Marxist understanding, is part of such an effort."

"It is clear that the soul of the story of *Ramayana*, in its essence, protects the exploitative, feudal social set up. Therefore, it is very much necessary to analyse it in terms of social evolution and expose its real nature to the people who are the victims of its Poisonous influence."

"**T**hough it is a fact that effort of this writer alone cannot accomplish social revolution, it will contribute towards it and it is not an obstacle."

"**....W**e have another kind of progressive critics. They too talk about Marxism. In their view, Rama's victory in *Ramayana* is the victory of 'good' in the conflict between 'good' and 'bad'. *Ramayana* is a great epic that carved India into a monolithic culture. Culture of *Ramayana* is a culture about which entire Indian nation can feel proud. Perhaps, they think that Indian nation is beyond classes!.... These people do not hesitate to reverse history and fundamentals of Marxism. Therefore, it is not necessary for Ranganayakamma or any genuine Marxist critic to be concerned with the critique of vulgar Marxists against *Ramayana, the Poisonous Tree*."

"**I**t is literally true that while '*Ramayana*, the wishing tree' delivered exploitative and poisonous fruits to the majority of people in the country, '*Ramayana*, the *Poisonous Tree*' gave them nectar fruits of class consciousness."

"**A** gentleman came to know that I was reading '*Ramayana*, the *Poisonous Tree*' and reprimanded me in a friendly manner, "Our Culture.... Our tradition....". I said, "I am reading it to understand the same (our culture, our tradition). Would you like to read?" He said, "No". "Why are you afraid that you may become an atheist?" I asked laughingly. The same man, after many days, took the '*Poisonous Tree*' today to read."

"**....A**s she pointed out in her preface, we have very little evidence about the evolution of history of India. Thorough research has to take place in this regard. Not all her views in this book may be complete. She made an attempt to the best of her ability, out of her care and interest in the liberation of majority people who are the victims of exploitative culture. There is always a scope to rectify the present short comings on the basis of new evidence and experience which we may find in future in the process of churning of the sea of history in search of truth. Therefore, we hope Ranganayakamma, without being perturbed by various kinds of wrong criticism, will soon bring out the second part as well." ★

[Translation: **B.R.Bapuji**]

THE END

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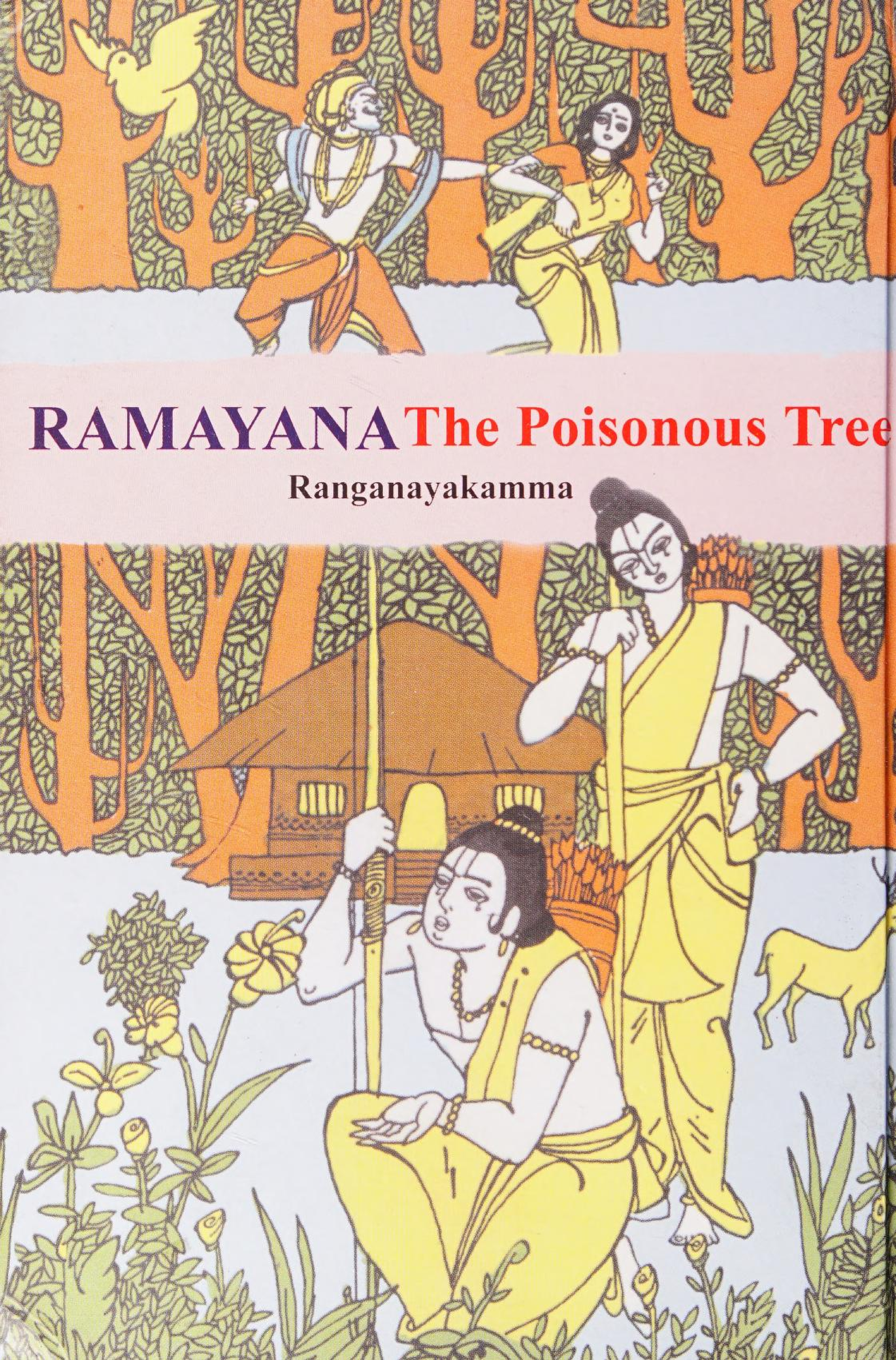

RAMAYANA The Poisonous Tree

Ranganayakamma